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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

BECKETT, PINTER, IONESCO:

A THEATRE OF REVOLT

BY



ZONIA OKSANA KEYWAN

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and
recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for
acceptance, a thesis entitled BECKETT, PINTER, IONESCO: A
THEATRE OF REVOLT
submitted by ZONIA OKSANA KEYWAN
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts.

ABSTRACT

A theme common to the plays of Beckett, Ionesco and Pinter is that of metaphysical revolt. Their characters refuse to accept the absurdity of the human condition. These playwrights' concept of metaphysical revolt is similar to Camus', and thus can be analyzed in terms of Camus' writings in Le Mythe de Sisyphe and L'Homme révolté.

Beckett, Ionesco and Pinter go beyond most of their contemporaries who write about the absurd and metaphysical revolt. For these playwrights, revolt is not only a dramatic theme, but also a dramatic method. These playwrights reject many of the basic principles of traditional, realistic theatre, such concepts as art as imitation of nature, drama as a branch of literature, logical structure, traditional characterization and strict divisions between tragedy and comedy. Their views on the role and function of the theatre are in some ways similar to those of Antonin Artaud, as outlined in Le Théâtre et son double.

A close analysis of one play by each author - Pinter's The Birthday Party, Beckett's Fin de partie and Ionesco's Le Roi se meurt - illustrates these playwrights' tendency toward revolt. In each of these plays, the central character or characters revolt against various aspects of the human condition, in particular, death. In form and structure, each of these plays constitutes a statement of revolt against traditional realistic drama.

PREFACE

This study of the theatre of Beckett, Ionesco and Pinter does not in any way pretend to be exhaustive. To attempt an exhaustive study of the works of these three dramatists at this time would be impossible for several reasons. First of all, all three of these writers are still living, and the corpus of their works cannot yet be assumed to be complete. All three have produced new dramatic works very recently: Ionesco's Jeux de massacre (also known as Le Triomphe de la mort, La Peste, and L'Epidémie) appeared in 1970; Pinter's Old Times appeared in 1971; Beckett's Not I was premiered in 1972. All three may still write many more plays. Thus, it is obviously too early to pronounce any final judgements upon their works as a whole.

Secondly, for practical purposes it has been necessary to limit the scope of this study. For this reason, only one play by each author has been chosen for close analysis. The decision to concentrate on The Birthday Party, Fin de partie and Le Roi se meurt was based on the belief that these three plays best reflect the similarities that exist between the works of these playwrights.

Because of limitations of time and space, some important aspects of the works of all three playwrights have had to be glossed over. For example, much more extensive analyses can be made of the language or the humour in their plays. In order to be complete, each of these topics would require separate studies.

Finally, it must be pointed out that although this study has concentrated on the similarities that can be found in the works of these playwrights, there are also a number of differences. I do not wish to imply

that Beckett, Ionesco and Pinter consciously form a school or movement, or that they have been influenced by each others' writings. I hope simply to have shown that many similarities exist, both in theme and in dramatic method, and that these similarities are most likely the product of the spirit of the times. I would agree with Martin Esslin, who writes in the preface to The Theatre of the Absurd,

The artists of an epoch have certain traits in common, but they are not necessarily conscious of them. Nor does the fact that they have these traits in common preclude them from being widely different in other respects.¹

and, like Esslin, I have attempted

. . . to make certain fundamental traits which seem to be present in the works of a number of dramatists accessible to discussion by tracing the features they have in common. That and no more.²

One more point should be made clear. Some of the claims with regard to the novelty of the dramatic methods used by Beckett, Pinter and Ionesco may seem to be exaggerated. It is true that some of their "innovations" are not entirely original. They have appeared at various times in the past in the Western theatrical tradition, for example, in medieval mystery and morality plays, and, more recently, in the works of Alfred Jarry, the Surrealists and the Expressionists. There are two reasons for this apparent neglect of earlier similar strains of drama. In the first place, I am for the most part presenting the views of the playwrights and theoreticians themselves, in particular Ionesco and Artaud, who, it must be admitted, tend to ignore their immediate predecessors. In the second place, within their immediate context, that is the post-war literary scene, they are indeed original and innovative.

A word should be said about the format of this thesis. The theoretical framework, which forms the basis for comparison of the works of Beckett, Ionesco and Pinter, is laid down in the first two chapters. Chapter I deals with revolt as a theme common to all three playwrights; Chapter II shows their common practice of revolt in the sphere of dramatic form and structure. The last three chapters pass from a general theoretical outline to a close scrutiny of the works themselves. One play by each author is discussed following the principles presented in the first two chapters. Notes are provided at the end of each chapter. The bibliography includes only those books and articles which were consulted specifically for the purposes of this thesis. With regard to works by the three playwrights themselves, only the most relevant, that is, only those that are actually mentioned in the thesis, are listed.

FOOTNOTES

1 Martin Esslin, "Preface to the Pelican Edition," The Theatre of the Absurd, 2nd ed. (1961; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 10.

2 Ibid., p. 10.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Works by Beckett, Ionesco and Pinter which are quoted frequently are abbreviated as follows:

<u>BP</u>	<u>The Birthday Party</u> . London: Methuen, 1960.
<u>FDP</u>	<u>Fin de partie</u> . Paris: Minuit, 1957.
<u>E</u>	<u>Endgame</u> . New York: Grove Press, 1958.
<u>Notes</u>	<u>Notes et contre-notes</u> . Paris: Gallimard, 1962.
<u>RM</u>	<u>Le Roi se meurt</u> . <u>Théâtre</u> IV. Paris: Gallimard, 1966.

I. THE THEME OF REVOLT

Beckett, Ionesco and Pinter are essentially metaphysical writers. The subject matter of their plays is what may be broadly designated as the human condition. That is, they deal with the permanent realities of human existence, its basic and insoluble problems: man's fears and anguish, his solitude, suffering, and death. Social and political concerns are of secondary importance to these playwrights. Unlike such dramatists as Sartre or Brecht, they are not committed writers. They reject the notion of a didactic theatre which would use the play as a vehicle for the propagation of a favourite political line or theory. Ideological, didactic theatre, they feel, is of limited value because social conditions are always changing. The human condition, on the other hand, remains the same throughout the ages.

Ionesco is the most vocal of the three playwrights. He states repeatedly that his interest is in the human condition rather than in social conditions:

Ce qui, personnellement, m'obsède, ce qui m'intéresse profondément, ce qui m'engage c'est le problème de la condition humaine (Notes, 114)

The basic problems of the human condition, such as, for example, death, exist independently of social and political systems, he points out,

La condition essentielle de l'homme n'est pas sa condition de citoyen mais sa condition de mortel. Lorsque je parle de la mort, tout le monde me comprend. La mort n'est ni bourgeoise ni socialiste. (Notes, 205)

and they remain constant in spite of the changes that occur in social structures:

Aucune société n'a pu abolir la tristesse humaine, aucun système politique ne peut nous libérer de la douleur de vivre, de la peur de mourir, de notre soif de l'absolu.

C'est la condition humaine qui gouverne la condition sociale, non le contraire. (Notes, 73)

Ideological theatre, according to Ionesco, is not art. It is vulgar and shallow, reduced to serving as a mere tool of the ideology it demonstrates. He says:

Tout théâtre d'idéologie risque de n'être que théâtre de patronage. Quelle serait, non pas son utilité, mais sa fonction propre, si le théâtre était condamné à faire uniquement double emploi avec la philosophie, ou la théologie, ou la politique, ou la pédagogie? Un théâtre psychologique est insuffisamment psychologique. Mieux vaut lire un traité de psychologie. Un théâtre idéologique est insuffisamment philosophique. Au lieu d'aller voir l'illustration dramatique de telle ou telle politique, je préfère lire mon quotidien habituel ou écouter parler les candidats de mon parti. (Notes, 11)

Ideological art is capable only of very limited appeal. It is of interest only to those who already share the author's ideas, or those who are prepared to be persuaded to accept them. It can last only as long as particular social conditions last, or as long as a certain theory is fashionable. To use art as a vehicle for propaganda is to misuse it and degrade it, for, "L'art est le domaine de la passion, non pas celui de l'enseignement scolaire" (Notes, 18)

Harold Pinter is as opposed to ideological and didactic theatre as is Ionesco. He says:

No, I'm not committed as a writer, in the usual sense of the term, either religiously or politically. And I'm not conscious of any particular social function. I write because I want to write. I don't carry any banners. Ultimately I distrust any definitive labels.¹

While interviewing Pinter, Kenneth Tynan accused the playwright of failing to create characters who are convincing social beings, living in a social milieu. Pinter's reply to this accusation demonstrates that he, like Ionesco, believes that the problems of the human condition

are more basic and more important than various social questions, and it is with these important issues that he tries to deal in his plays:

There is no reason to suppose that at one time or another they didn't listen to a political meeting, or they might even have voted . . . I'm dealing with these characters at the extreme edge of their living, where they are living pretty much alone, at their hearth, their home hearth . . . We all, I think . . . may have sexual relationships or go to political meetings or discuss ideas, but when we get back to our rooms and we are faced with a bed and we are either alone or with someone else, then . . . I don't think we go on long about ideas or political allegiances I mean, there comes a point, surely, where this living in the world must be tied up with living in your own world, where you are - in your room . . . Before you manage to adjust yourself to living alone in your room . . . you are not terribly fit and equipped to go out and fight the battles . . . which are fought mostly in abstractions in the outside world.²

It is because Pinter is concerned with man's solitude, and the problems that man has to face in solitude, that the room, as has often been pointed out, is a predominant metaphor in his plays. The solitary room is a symbol of both a private and secure refuge from the world, and of man's isolation from other men.

Beckett, of course, is famous for his reticence. He makes no public statements, either about his own works or about the theatre in general. Yet there is no doubt that of all major modern dramatists he is most clearly a purely metaphysical writer. His plays represent the extreme of uncommitted, non-didactic art. Specific social conditions do not enter into his works in any way. His characters, and the situations he creates in his plays, belong to no identifiable social context. They seem to exist outside of time and place. In the eyes of Ionesco, Beckett is a prime example of a contemporary playwright who is truly metaphysical. He says,

... chez lui, c'est la totalité de la condition humaine

qui entre en jeu, et non pas l'homme de telle ou telle société, ni l'homme vu à travers et aliéné par une certaine idéologie qui, à la fois, simplifie et ampute la réalité historique et métaphysique, la réalité authentique dans laquelle l'homme est intégré L'important, la vérité, c'est que l'homme apparaisse dans ses dimensions, ses profondeurs multiples. Chez Beckett, c'est le problème des fins dernières de l'homme qui se pose (Notes, 114)

Comparing him to an ideological playwright, Brecht, Ionesco says of Beckett, " . . . l'image que cet auteur donne de l'histoire, de la condition humaine, est plus complexe, mieux fondée." (Notes, 114)

The works of Ionesco, Beckett, and Pinter are capable of appeal to men of different ages and cultures. As Ionesco says, "Les oeuvres d'art les plus jeunes, les plus neuves se reconnaissent et parlent à toutes les époques." (Notes, 134) Their plays present universal, archetypal images of man's condition. Their themes are not entirely new: they are similar to the themes of those great writers of the past whose vision of the world was essentially tragic: the Greek tragedians, the author of the Book of Job, Shakespeare. Ionesco places both himself and Beckett within this tradition of tragedy when he says, "Oui, c'est le roi Salomon qui est mon chef de file; et Job, ce contemporain de Beckett." (Notes, 134) The few basic themes of tragedy, for example the themes that Ionesco finds in Shakespeare's Richard II - "Tous les hommes meurent dans la solitude; toutes les valeurs se dégradent dans le mépris " (Notes, 19) - are the only ones that are truly universal, for "L'archétype est toujours jeune." (Notes, 110) They are the only ones that interest all men because they reflect directly their personal living experiences.

Beckett, Pinter and Ionesco are often regarded as avant-garde dramatists. They certainly do not write traditional forms of tragedy, and their view of the world is in many ways unconventional. Yet, because

of their concern with the human condition and their essentially tragic themes, Ionesco sees fit to equate their avant-gardism with classicism. He says,

Finalement, je suis pour le classicisme: c'est cela, l'avant-garde. Découverte d'archétypes oubliés, l'immuables, renouvelés dans l'expression: Tout vrai créateur est classique
(Notes, 110)

This does not mean, however, that these playwrights are in no way original. The relationship of their works with those of the past, both the similarities and the differences, is summed up as follows by Martin Esslin, who includes their plays in the category of "the Theatre of the Absurd":

Concerned as it is with the ultimate realities of the human condition, the relatively few fundamental problems of life and death, isolation and communication, the Theatre of the Absurd, however grotesque, frivolous, and irreverent it may appear, represents a return to the original, religious function of the theatre - the confrontation of man with the spheres of myth and religious reality. Like ancient Greek tragedy and the medieval mystery plays and baroque allegories, the Theatre of the Absurd is intent on making its audience aware of man's precarious and mysterious position in the universe.

The difference is merely that in ancient Greek tragedy - and comedy - as well as in the medieval mystery play and the baroque auto sacramental, the ultimate realities concerned were generally known and universally accepted metaphysical systems, while the Theatre of the Absurd expresses the absence of any such generally accepted cosmic system of values. Hence, much more modestly, the Theatre of the Absurd makes no pretence at explaining the ways of God to man. It can merely present, in anxiety or with derision, an individual human being's intuition of the ultimate realities as he experiences them; the fruits of one man's descent into the depths of his personality, his dreams, fantasies, and nightmares.³

The works of Beckett, Ionesco and Pinter constitute a theatre of revolt. The central subjects of their plays are the problems of the human condition; their attitude toward these problems is one of revolt. In assuming this posture of revolt they align themselves with one of the

major currents of twentieth-century literature. The absurdity of human life, and man's revolt against this absurdity are recurring themes in modern literary works.

Modern man finds himself living in a world from which belief in God and in absolute values has disappeared. This is a difficult and confusing state of affairs. As Ionesco says in his note on Kafka,

. . . coupé de ses racines religieuses ou métaphysiques,
l'homme est perdu, toute sa démarche devient insensée,
inutile, étouffante. (Notes, 232)

Man suddenly finds himself in possession of much greater freedom than ever before, but at the same time, much greater responsibility. He has nothing and no one to rely upon outside of himself. His world has been deprived of an ultimate meaning or purpose; in other words, it appears to be absurd. One possible reaction to this state of affairs is revolt against it. Since literature reflects the attitudes and the spirit of its time, these themes of confusion, absurdity, and revolt are characteristic of much of modern literature.

Of course, revolt as a literary theme was not invented in the twentieth century. It appeared at different times in writings of the past, but, as John Cruickshank points out in his study of Camus' works, there is a major difference in the nature and extent of revolt between the past and the present:

It is true, of course, that revolt in some form or other has often been a literary theme. Contemporary writers hold no exclusive monopoly in the subject. To go back no farther than the last century, we can point to the Romantics who produced a characteristic literature of revolt, and this revolt was a complex one with artistic, social, and metaphysical aspects. The Romantic poets of England and France accepted an idealist tradition, however, in so far as they continued to believe in general and absolute values like Truth, Liberty, Nature, Intellectual Beauty, Pure Spirit. They were also traditional humanists in the sense that they accepted the reality of a Human

Nature. The individual had a definite place in the order of things and his chief aim, even in revolt, was to embody within himself, as far as possible, a prior conception of Human Nature.

With the beginning of this century generally accepted values began noticeably to lose their power to evoke instinctive respect.⁴

Some of the most influential statements about the absurd and man's revolt against it have been made by Albert Camus, particularly in Le Mythe de Sisyphe and L'Homme révolté. These two works can thus be used as a point of reference in the discussion of metaphysical revolt as a theme in the plays of Beckett, Pinter and Ionesco. This is not to suggest, of course, that any of these playwrights have been directly influenced by the writings of Camus. Direct influence of one writer upon another is difficult to prove or disprove. It is more profitable to assume that all of these writers reflect a common spirit of their age.

Beckett, Ionesco and Pinter, or, more precisely, the characters they create, are like Camus' homme révolté: "Qu'est-ce qu'un homme révolté? Un homme qui dit non."⁵ Their attitude toward the world fits Camus' definition of metaphysical revolt, which is as follows:

La révolte métaphysique est le mouvement par lequel un homme se dresse contre sa condition et la création tout entière. Elle est métaphysique parce qu'elle conteste les fins de l'homme et de la création.⁶

What aspects of the human condition does the metaphysical rebel find unacceptable? Briefly, in the words of Camus' Caligula, it is the fact that "Les hommes meurent et ils ne sont pas heureux."⁷

In the past, man felt certain of his privileged position in the universe; he felt comfortably at home. There appeared to be a sense of order and harmony in the world. Everything had its proper place and purpose. But modern man has lost this sense of security. He suddenly

finds himself a stranger in the once-familiar universe. Camus describes this experience as a perception of the absurd:

. . . dans un univers soudain privé d'illusions et de lumières, l'homme se sent un étranger. Cet exil est sans recours, puisqu'il est privé des souvenirs d'une patrie perdue ou de l'espoir d'une terre promise. Ce divorce entre l'homme et sa vie, l'acteur et son décor, c'est proprement le sentiment de l'absurdité.⁸

The feeling of absurdity springs from the impossibility of reconciling man, a conscious being, with an unconscious universe. Man is the only creature that is conscious of itself; he alone is capable of dissatisfaction with his condition. As Camus says, "L'homme est la seule créature qui refuse d'être ce qu'elle est."⁹ As a being endowed with an intellect, man seeks order and purpose, but he does not find it. This demand for order and unity gives birth to the impulse to revolt.

La révolte naît du spectacle de la déraison, devant une condition injuste et incompréhensible. Mais son élan aveugle revendique l'ordre au milieu du chaos et l'unité au coeur même de ce que fuit et disparaît. Elle crie, elle exige, elle veut que le scandale cesse et que se fixe enfin ce qui jusqu'ici s'écrivait sans trêve sur la mer.¹⁰

Not only is man alienated from the universe, he is also alienated from himself and from others. Man can no longer be certain of who another is, or even who he is himself. His personality is not fixed; it is in a constant state of flux. As Beckett writes in his essay on Proust,

We are not merely more weary because of yesterday, we are other, no longer what we were before the calamity of yesterday The aspirations of yesterday were valid for yesterday's ego, not for to-day's. We are disappointed at the nullity of what we are pleased to call attainment. . . . For subject B to be disappointed by the banality of an object chosen by subject A is as illogical as to expect one's hunger to be dissipated by the spectacle of Uncle eating his dinner.¹¹

The instability of man's personality is amply illustrated in the

plays of Beckett, Ionesco and Pinter. In En attendant Godot, for example, the Gogo and Didi, Pozzo and Lucky, of the second act are not the same as those of the first, although only one day has elapsed between the acts. They fail to remember the events of the previous day; it is as though not they, but someone else had experienced them. Pozzo and Lucky, who could see and speak in the first act, are inexplicably blind and dumb in the second. In Krapp's Last Tape the old Krapp on the stage is very different from the younger Krapp whose voice is heard on the tape. Their goals and aspirations, their views of the world, are entirely different. The personalities of Ionesco's characters are just as fluid. His characters undergo many transformations, at times into completely different characters, as in Victimes du devoir. The identity of many of Pinter's characters is difficult, even impossible, to determine. In The Room, The Birthday Party, The Caretaker, characters are referred to by a number of different names. Neither the audience, nor the other characters in the plays can be certain who the person really is. It seems that they themselves may not be sure of their identities. In A Slight Ache characters are transformed into each other: Edward and the Matchseller exchange identities. In The Lover a husband and wife turn into different people in order to play out their fantasy of lover and mistress.

The alienation of human beings from each other is illustrated in the plays by the lack of communication between characters. It has often been pointed out that these three playwrights, particularly Pinter and Ionesco, have created a theatre of non-communication. Pinter explains the difficulty of communication in this way:

. . . what takes place is continual evasion, desperate rear-guard attempts to keep ourselves to ourselves. Communication is too alarming. To enter into someone else's life is too frightening. To disclose to others the poverty within us is too fearsome a possibility.¹²

Just as the universe is characterized by chaos and disharmony, so is man's personal life. As has already been noted, this is an age from which most principles of order and guidance have disappeared - God, and absolutes such as Good and Evil, Truth, and Beauty. Man no longer knows where to turn. His life is deprived of any sense of direction or purpose: he finds himself living in a void. Ionesco describes the feeling of emptiness that often overcomes him:

Le monde m'apparaît à certains moments comme vidé de signification, la réalité: irréelle. C'est ce sentiment d'irréalité, la recherche d'une réalité essentielle, oubliée, innommée - hors de laquelle je ne me sens pas être - que j'ai voulu exprimer à travers mes personnages qui errent dans l'incohérent, n'ayant rien en propre en dehors de leurs angoisses, leurs remords, leurs échecs, la vacuité de leur vie. (Notes 165)

If the human condition appears to be lacking in purpose and order, then certain aspects of that condition, which in the past could be explained as essential parts of a Divine Order, now appear to be unjustifiable. The evil and suffering which have always been a part of man's life can no longer be seen as having an ultimate - even if unknown - purpose; they now appear to be gratuitous. No longer can man comfort himself with the belief that evil will ultimately be punished in an afterworld, that goodness and innocence will be rewarded. Consequences of actions seem to depend for the most part on chance. Nothing, nobody, is directing the human drama. As we see in Ionesco's Tueur sans gages, evil, as personified by the killer, is answerable to no one. The killer acts capriciously, at random, and no rational basis can be attributed to his actions.

Man's suffering is just as gratuitous. That man's lot on earth is to suffer is an old, traditional theme. But in the past a meaning and a

purpose could be attributed to his suffering: he could comfort himself with the belief that the more he suffered on earth, the more he would be rewarded in heaven. When this comforting illusion is dispelled, man's misery appears to be totally futile. Thus Beckett's works abound in characters who endure extreme forms of suffering for no apparent reason: They are crippled, mutilated, humiliated in every way. It is as though, as Beckett says in Proust, man's whole life were an expiation of a sin for which he is not responsible - the sin of having been born:

Tragedy is not concerned with human justice. Tragedy is the statement of an expiation, but not the miserable expiation of a codified breach of a local arrangement, organised by the knaves for the fools. The tragic figure represents the expiation of original sin, of the original and eternal sin of him and all his 'soci malorum,' the sin of having been born.

'Pues el delito mayor
Del hombre es haber nacido.'¹³

The human condition can appear to be meaningless and absurd only if the idea of God is eliminated, for He incarnates the ultimate principle of order and purpose. But the metaphysical rebel need not necessarily be atheistic. What he must reject, however, is the concept of a just, paternal, loving God who is concerned with the affairs of man. As Camus says, "Un dieu sans récompense ni châtement, un dieu sourd est la seule imagination religieuse des révoltés."¹⁴ If the metaphysical rebel accepts the existence of God, he must condemn Him as the being who is responsible for man's state of affairs. Thus, while he need not be an atheist, he must be a blasphemer:

Le révolté métaphysique n'est donc pas sûrement athée comme on pourrait le croire, mais il est forcément blasphémateur. Simplement, il blasphème d'abord au nom de l'ordre, dénonçant en Dieu le père de la mort

et le suprême scandale.¹⁵

Beckett, more than Pinter or Ionesco, seems to be unable to dismiss the idea of God. His works are filled with religious references and images of God. But the God - the only possible God - that appears in such works as En attendant Godot or Fin de partie is seen through the eyes of a blasphemer. If God exists, Beckett shows us in these plays, then He is a cruel and capricious tyrant, a sadist who delights in seeing man suffer, yet does nothing to help or comfort him, and offers no reward for virtue.

Of all the injustices implicit in the human condition, the gravest and most unacceptable is the fact that man is condemned to death. In a chaotic world filled with uncertainties, the one absolute certainty in every man's life is that he is going to die: "La mort est là comme seule réalité."¹⁶ Although man may be able to forget temporarily that he is mortal, he cannot help realizing, at least occasionally, that every moment that he lives brings him that much closer to death. Life is but a journey toward death, as Ionesco points out, "Mais n'allons-nous pas tous vers la mort? La mort est bien le terme, le but de toute existence. . . . Vivre c'est mourir" (Notes, 139) Pozzo, in Beckett's En attendant Godot expresses a similar sentiment in a more brutal manner: "Elles accouchent à cheval sur une tombe, le jour brille un instant, puis c'est la nuit à nouveau."¹⁷

The awareness of his mortal condition inspires in man fear and anger; every man feels " . . . une détestation souterraine de la condition même de l'homme, de la condition mortelle." (Notes, 139-40) It is

natural for man to wish to be immortal. The individual consciousness wants to be; it cannot conceive of itself as ceasing to exist. As Béranger cries out in Ionesco's Le Roi se meurt, "Il n'est pas naturel de mourir, puis qu'on ne veut pas. Je veux être." (RM, 46)

A man who does not believe that his existence will continue after death sees no purpose to his life. What is the point of an existence that lasts a few short years only to be permanently cut off by death? All man's dreams, hopes and passions, the goals and values that he may consider to be so important, suddenly become trivial in the face of death. Looking at his life in the light of its ultimate destiny he realizes

. . . le caractère dérisoire de cette habitude, [of life]
l'absence de toute raison profonde de vivre, le caractère
insensé de cette agitation quotidienne et l'inutilité de
la souffrance.¹⁸

For Ionesco, human life often assumes the quality of a nightmare, full of darkness and confusion and useless agitation. He says,

Je n'ai pas d'autres images du monde, en dehors de celles exprimant l'évanescence et la dureté, la vanité et la colère, le néant ou la haine hideuse, inutile. C'est ainsi que l'existence a continué de m'apparaître. Tout n'a fait que confirmer ce que j'avais vu, ce que j'avais compris dans mon enfance: fureurs vaines et sordides, cris soudain étouffés par le silence, ombres s'engloutissant, à jamais, dans la nuit. (Notes, 132)

Although in the past man was generally able to overcome the powerful feeling of the futility of all human efforts and aspirations with thoughts of eternal life after death, it is Shakespeare who perhaps best expressed the problem faced by twentieth-century secular man, when he wrote in Macbeth,

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage

And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.¹⁹

Given the metaphysical rebel's view of the human condition - his realization of the misery and unhappiness of man's life, its ultimate pointlessness in the face of death - it may seem most logical for him to hasten the end of a useless existence by committing suicide. But this is not in fact what he chooses to do. The characters in the plays, for example Ionesco's Béranger (Le Roi se meurt), Pinter's Stanley (The Birthday Party) and Beckett's miserable and mutilated people, cling to life in spite of all. In En attendant Godot, for example, Gogo and Didi, while apparently wishing to be relieved of the burden of their lives, still find excuses for not committing suicide. They do not hang themselves because the tree may break under their weight. Man's natural impulse is to live; if not the mind, then at least the body tends toward life rather than annihilation, as Camus points out:

Devant ces contradictions et ces obscurités, faut-il donc croire qu'il n'y a aucun rapport entre l'opinion qu'on peut avoir sur la vie et le geste qu'on fait pour la quitter? N'exagérons rien dans ce sens. Dans l'attachement d'un homme à sa vie, il y a quelque chose de plus fort que toutes les misères du monde. Le jugement du corps vaut bien celui de l'esprit et le corps recule devant l'anéantissement.²⁰

On the more rational level, there is another reason for continuing to live. Since death is one of the aspects, the most unacceptable aspect, of the human condition, self-imposed death would be not revolt against, but rather acceptance of, the human condition. It is by insisting on continuing one's life that one can attempt to revolt against one's condition. Cruikshank explains this position in more detail:

. . . suicide can only be an instance of collusion with the absurd and not a solution of it. It may even be argued that suicide, far from negating the absurd, actually confirms and intensifies it. Death, as we have already seen, is one of the features of the absurd. Now suicide means a voluntary moving forward and anticipation of death in time. On the other hand the impulse to revolt which the absurd arouses in the individual is partly revolt against the fact of death. It is not consistent with this revolt that one should deliberately connive at death by suicide. The natural impulse of the man condemned to death is to desire life all the more intensely.²¹

To revolt against the absurdity of the human condition may in itself appear to be absurd. Man cannot alter his condition in any significant way: he cannot eradicate all evil and suffering from the world; he cannot abolish death. Thus it is not realistic to attempt to revolt against one's condition. But, as Camus says, "La révolte n'est pas réaliste."²² The metaphysical rebel does not cherish any comforting hopes or illusions. He does not delude himself into thinking that he will save himself or the world. Metaphysical revolt

. . . n'est pas aspiration, elle est sans espoir. Cette révolte n'est que l'assurance d'un destin écrasant, moins la résignation que devrait l'accompagner.²³

It is a "refus d'espérer", a "témoignage obstiné d'une vie sans consolation".²⁴ The metaphysical rebel must voice his discontent, he must launch his protest, although he knows that this will bring no tangible results.

But there is some value in this seemingly hopeless revolt, for it is an affirmation of " . . . ce qui, en l'homme, est toujours à défendre".²⁵ It gives some meaning and value to an otherwise meaningless existence:

Cette révolte donne son prix à la vie. Etendue sur toute la longueur d'une existence, elle lui restitue sa grandeur.²⁶

It is a rebellious insistence on maintaining human pride and dignity, and in this there is much to admire. This revolt also serves as an affirmation of man's intellectual honesty and lucidity. If the meta-physical rebel lives without hope, at least he is not deluding himself with false hopes and illusions. He rejects sentimentality and all comfort and consolation. He prefers to face his condition with open eyes and mind. Beckett's characters are, for the most part, remarkable for the lucidity with which they face the world. The old Krapp, for example, prefers his now almost empty, but honest and lucid existence, to the sentimentality and ambition of his youth.

For the majority of people, this honest and lucid attitude is both difficult and frightening. It is easier to lose oneself in day-to-day activities, goals and ambitions, religious beliefs, and political or other causes. Life, for most people, is essentially a habit. Both Camus, and Beckett, in Proust, remark on this. Camus says,

Nous prenons l'habitude de vivre avant d'acquérir celle de penser.²⁷

On continue à faire les gestes que l'existence commande, pour beaucoup de raisons dont la première est l'habitude.²⁸

And Beckett writes,

Habit is the ballast that chains the dog to his vomit. Breathing is habit. Life is habit. Or rather life is a succession of habits, since the individual is a succession of individuals. . . . Habit then is the generic term for the countless treaties concluded between the countless subjects that constitute the individual and their countless correlative objects.²⁹

The routine of daily life tends to numb consciousness. It prevents man from reflecting on his condition. He does not have time to stop and think about, and come to terms with, his basic problems: the meaning of his life, the inevitability of death. Or he may accept a ready-made

solution to these problems, such as is provided by religious beliefs. But in every man's life there comes at least one moment when in spite of himself he escapes the deadening effect of the habit of his life, and experiences a flash of insight into the true nature of his condition. This moment of lucidity Camus calls the first awareness of the absurd. It is

. . . ce singulier état d'âme où le vide devient éloquent, où la chaîne des gestes quotidiens est rompue, où le coeur cherche en vain le maillon que la renoue, elle est alors comme le premier signe de l'absurdité.³⁰

Beckett describes the same experience as the period of transition between an old habit and a new one:

The periods of transition that separate consecutive adaptations . . . represent the perilous zones in the life of the individual, dangerous, precarious, painful, mysterious and fertile, when for a moment the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being.³¹

This glimpse of human reality, of the void, is disturbing and frightening. Instead of facing it squarely, most men instinctively try to assimilate it, to cover it up by reverting to their beliefs and illusions, by resuming a habitual way of life. This evasion is what Sartre calls "bad faith", what Camus considers to be the only sin l'homme absurde can commit³², what Beckett calls the formation of a new habit:

Between this death and that birth, reality, intolerable, absorbed feverishly by his consciousness at the extreme limit of its intensity, by his total consciousness organised to avert the disaster, to create the new habit that will empty the mystery of its threat - and also of its beauty.³³

The metaphysical rebel is he who refuses to close his eyes and turn his back on the lucid perception of the absurdity of the human condition.

In their plays, Beckett, Ionesco and Pinter force us to keep our eyes fixed on the void. The experience of "the suffering of being", of "ce singulier état d'âme où le vide devient éloquent" lies at the very heart of their works.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Harold Pinter, cited by Arnold Hinchliffe, Harold Pinter (New York: Twayne, 1967), p. 37.
- 2 Pinter, interviewed by Tynan in the series "People Today," B.B.C. Home Service, 28 Oct. 1960; cited by Martin Esslin, The Peopled Wound: The Work of Harold Pinter (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970), p.5.
- 3 Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, p. 392.
- 4 John Cruickshank, Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt (1959; rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 5.
- 5 Albert Camus, L'Homme révolté (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), p. 25.
- 6 Ibid., p. 39.
- 7 Albert Camus, Le Malentendu et Caligula (Paris: Gallimard, 1947) p. 111.
- 8 Albert Camus, Le Mythe de Sisyphe (Paris: Gallimard, 1942), p. 18.
- 9 Camus, L'Homme révolté, p. 22.
- 10 Ibid., p. 21.
- 11 Samuel Beckett, Proust (1931; rpt. New York: Grove Press, 1957), p. 3.
- 12 Pinter, speech to the Seventh National Student Drama Festival in Bristol, Sunday Times, London, 4 March 1962; cited by Esslin, The Peopled Wound, p. 42.
- 13 Beckett, Proust, p. 49.
- 14 Camus, L'Homme révolté, p. 47.
- 15 Ibid., p. 40.
- 16 Camus, Le Mythe de Sisyphe, p. 81.
- 17 Beckett, En attendant Godot (Paris: Minuit, 1952), p. 154.
- 18 Camus, Le Mythe de Sisyphe, p. 18.
- 19 William Shakespeare, Complete Works, ed. Hardin Craig (Glenview: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1961), V,v,24-28.
- 20 Camus, Le Mythe de Sisyphe, p. 20.
- 21 Cruickshank, p. 60.
- 22 Camus, L'Homme révolté, p. 30.

- 23 Camus, Le Mythe de Sisyphe, p. 77.
- 24 Ibid., p. 84.
- 25 Camus, L'Homme révolté, p. 32.
- 26 Camus, Le Mythe de Sisyphe, p. 78.
- 27 Ibid., p. 20.
- 28 Ibid., p. 18.
- 29 Beckett, Proust, p. 8.
- 30 Camus, Le Mythe de Sisyphe, p. 27.
- 31 Beckett, Proust, p. 8.
- 32 Cruickshank writes, "Camus does suggest, however, that the notion of sin can have meaning for l'homme absurde in one single situation. It is a sin to reject lucidity and turn one's back on the evidence it provides." p. 67.
- 33 Beckett, Proust, p. 10-11.

II. THE METHOD OF REVOLT

As a description of the works of Beckett, Pinter and Ionesco, the term "theatre of revolt" functions on more than one plane. It refers not only to the matter - the central themes, the basic philosophic position - but also to the manner - the form and structure - of their plays. Thus, while these playwrights may not be breaking new ground in choosing meta-physical revolt as a central theme of their plays, they do go a step beyond most of their contemporaries by making their plays fully integrated statements of revolt. That is, unlike others who write in this vein, they not only discuss the absurd and revolt, they demonstrate it on the stage. In this way they surpass even the major theoreticians of these concepts, Camus and Sartre, as Serge Doubrovsky points out:

Si le thème central de la littérature des vingt dernières années est l'absurdité d'un monde où l'homme est seul pour combler le vide de Dieu, donner un nom et un sens aux choses et créer librement, mais injustifiablement ses valeurs, il faut reconnaître que l'expression littéraire, jusqu'à Beckett et Ionesco, était restée bien en deçà de l'intention philosophique. . . . Sartre et Camus, dans l'exploration de l'absurde que constituent La Nausée ou Le Mythe de Sisyphe, se servent d'une langue admirablement logique pour traduire l'illogique, de la nécessité interne des phrases pour exprimer la contingence radicale du monde, et de la littérature pour nier la littérature. Pour exprimer authentiquement l'absurde, il faut inventer le langage de l'absurde, créer des formes qui ne soient pas celles du discours rationnel. . . . Un théâtre irrationaliste n'est donc pas seulement un théâtre qui attaque les idoles du rationalisme, le progrès-vers-le-bonheur-par-la-science . . . c'est surtout un théâtre qui soit conçu pour exprimer véritablement l'irrationnel. Le théâtre traditionnel était cohérent, parce que l'homme qu'il présentait était cohérent. De ce point de vue, même des écrivains de l'absurde, comme Sartre ou Camus, restent, dans leur théâtre aussi bien que dans leur style, tout à fait conservateurs.¹

Beckett, Pinter and Ionesco's revolt against the prevailing form of twentieth-century drama is their reaction to a form of art that they believe to have lost its life and power. Several other avant-garde

writers have shared this belief. Antonin Artaud's Le Théâtre et son double is a call for total revolution within Western theatre. Jean Genet wrote in his foreword to Les Bonnes, " . . . c'est du théâtre en général que je voudrais dire quelques mots. Je ne l'aime pas."² In his Notes et contre-notes Ionesco expresses the same sentiment. The book begins with a statement of his distaste for the theatre:

Il me semble parfois que je me suis mis à écrire du théâtre parce que je le détestais. Je lisais des oeuvres littéraires, des essais, j'allais au cinéma avec plaisir. J'écoutais de temps à autre de la musique, je visitais les galeries d'art, mais je n'allais pour ainsi dire jamais au théâtre. . . . La représentation théâtrale n'avait pas de magie pour moi. Tout me paraissait un peu ridicule, un peu pénible. (Notes, 3)

The major objections to the prevailing form of drama, drama which may be broadly designated as realistic and psychological, are that it limits the scope of the theatre in various ways, preventing it from achieving its full potential as a unique and independent art form, and that it has lost its power to move its audience.

One of the limiting factors of modern theatre has been the commonly-held view of drama as nothing more than a branch of literature. In Le Théâtre et son double Artaud vehemently attacks this notion. Western theatre, he says, suffers under the tyranny of the spoken word. Language, that is, written dialogue which is articulated on the stage, reigns supreme on Western stages, yet it is not specifically theatrical. It is because of the spoken word's undue importance in Western theatre that drama has been relegated to the status of a mere branch of literature. Artaud writes on this point,

Le dialogue - chose écrite et parlée - n'appartient pas spécifiquement à la scène, il appartient au livre; et la preuve, c'est que l'on réserve dans les manuels d'histoire littéraire une place au théâtre considéré

comme une branche accessoire de l'histoire du langage articulé.³

In attaching so much importance to spoken language, to the written text of the play rather than to the mise en scène, writers and producers forget that theatre has a language of its own, a "langage physique et concret", whose value lies in the fact that " . . . les pensées qu'il exprime échappent au langage articulé."⁴ All those elements of a dramatic production that are specifically and uniquely theatrical - sets, lighting, costumes, make-up, movement - are generally relegated to a secondary position. In this way, the potential of the theatre as an independent and unique artistic medium is wasted. This, according to Artaud, is sheer stupidity on the part of Western theatre, and he does not hesitate to voice his disapproval:

. . . un théâtre qui soumet la mise en scène et la réalisation, c'est-à-dire tout ce qu'il y a en lui de spécifiquement théâtral, au texte, est un théâtre d'idiot, de fou, d'inverti, de grammairien, d'épicier, d'anti-poète et de positiviste, c'est-à-dire d'Occidental.⁵

Given the Western notion of theatre, there is no reason for producing plays on the stage, since almost the same effect can be achieved by writing a novel, an essay, or some other form of literature. Theatre must assert and regain its independence as an art form by rejecting the belief in the supremacy of written/spoken language over other elements of the play.

The disintegration of a coherent, rational world-view has been accompanied by a collapse of the belief in the efficacy of language as a vehicle of rational communication. This is apparent in the plays of Beckett, Ionesco and Pinter. Language is still used in their plays, to a greater degree than Artaud may have wished, but there is evidence of

a certain loss of faith in language. Both Pinter and Ionesco are noted for their skill in parodying ordinary language. Instead of using language that communicates ideas as clearly as possible, they often choose that type of language which communicates least, but which is so common in ordinary speech, the cliché. If the belief in the meaninglessness of ordinary language is taken to its extreme, words become interchangeable. Thus, in Ionesco's Jacques ou la soumission, all language is replaced by one word "chat", with no great loss to the little communication that had been taking place. La Cantatrice chauve is a prime illustration of the loss of faith in language as a rational means of communication. The dialogue in this play consists of language over which all control has been lost: it is irrational, incoherent, and full of contradictions. In the works of all three playwrights the failure of language to function as a true description of reality is shown by the lack of correspondence between the speech and the actions of characters. In Beckett's Fin de partie and En attendant Godot, for example, it is common for characters to say one thing and do another.

Having stripped the spoken word of some of its power, these writers make considerable use of extra-literary, purely theatrical devices. Although on the one hand, this is a step in a new direction, on the other, it is a return to the past. The origins of drama were not literary. It began, as Eliot points out in an essay of the same title, with "the beating of a drum": "The drama was originally ritual . . ."⁶ In its beginnings, then drama was not performed from a written text. It evolved from ritual, highly symbolic and religious in nature, which consisted of chant or song accompanied by stylized movement. Artaud, in his call for the renewal of Western theatre, urges a return of drama to

its ritualistic origins. Genet, who shares this view, has said that the only true drama that exists today is the Catholic Mass, which has retained its original symbolic, ritualistic quality. In his description of the Mass as ritualistic theatre, Genet gives an indication of its power to move and involve the observer, a power that most realistic theatre lacks:

Sur une scène presque semblable aux nôtres, sur une estrade, il s'agissait de reconstituer la fin d'un repas. A partir de cette seule donnée qu'on y retrouve à peine, le plus haut drame moderne s'est exprimé pendant deux mille ans et tous les jours dans le sacrifice de la messe. Le point de départ disparaît sous la profusion des ornements et des symboles que nous bouleversent encore. Sous les apparences les plus familières - une croûte de pain - on y dévore un dieu. Théâtralement, je ne sais rien de plus efficace que l'élévation. Quand cette apparence apparaît enfin devant nous - mais sous quelle forme, puisque toutes les têtes sont inclinées, le prêtre seul le sait, peut-être est-ce Dieu lui-même ou une simple pastille blanche qu'il tient au bout de ses quatre doigts? - ou cet autre moment de la messe quand le prêtre, ayant avec la patène découpé l'hostie, pour la montrer aux fidèles - non au public! - aux fidèles? Mais ils baissent encore la tête, ils prient donc, eux aussi? - la reconstitue et la mange. Dans sa bouche l'hostie craque!⁷

Ritualistic elements, or whole rituals, play an important part in many of the plays of Beckett, Ionesco and Pinter.⁸ Structural elements of ritual include such common features of the plays as repetition of gestures, phrases, and even whole patterns of events. By direct address or other means, the audience is often drawn into participation in the ritual that is taking place on the stage. Rituals of various sorts are often the subjects of the plays as well. These may be the common social and personal rituals which form a part of everyone's daily life - social interactions such as visits, and the various trivial actions that are performed on a regular basis. These minor rituals are often recreated for the purpose of parody. Larger, more significant rituals centre around various important ceremonial occasions: the celebration of a birthday (Krapp's Last Tape, The Birthday Party), a homecoming (The

Homecoming), or a dethronement (Le Roi se meurt).

These three playwrights make use of a number of other purely theatrical, extra-literary devices. These include all the elements of a play that appeal directly to the senses, without being conveyed by spoken language. They are often derived from "illegitimate" theatrical traditions, many of which are more ancient than classical, literary drama: circus clownery, mime, Commedia dell'Arte, or, more recently, vaudeville and silent film. Elements of these traditions occur frequently in Beckett's plays. His clownlike characters spend much of their time performing humorous actions: playing with hats and shoes, falling, picking each other up, climbing up and down ladders. Make-up or masks are used in Beckett's Fin de partie, and Ionesco's Jacques ou la soumission, where the heroine, Roberte II, has three noses. Various transformations, multiplications, and strange creatures abound in Ionesco's works. In Amédée ou comment s'en débarrasser, a corpse grows ever larger; in Rhinocéros a whole population of a town turns into rhinoceroses. The works of these playwrights are thus highly theatrical. This is very true even of Beckett's plays, which may appear to be undramatic because nothing seems to happen in them. But in his, as in the others' works, the potential of the medium of the stage is used to a far greater extent than in conventional, realistic drama.

Another obstacle to the full development and effectiveness of theatre in the twentieth century has been the continued acceptance of the concept of drama as imitation of nature. Even now, well into the twentieth century, at a time when most other arts have long abandoned realism, drama has remained basically realistic. Beckett, Pinter and Ionesco reject this restrictive view of the nature of drama. Their

revolt in this sphere is considered by William Oliver as one of the major characteristics of their theatre, which has been termed "the theatre of the absurd":

The tendency toward presentational drama is another pattern which identifies the creative posture of the absurdist. If there is one quality that marks the major trends of modern art and certainly the art which burgeons out of Paris, it is the movement toward pure art, or 'de-humanized art' as Ortega y Gasset puts it. Modern artists and absurd playwrights in particular seem concerned with creating works that proclaim their independence from the traditional neo-Aristotelian strictures of imitation or representationalism.⁹

These playwrights' opposition to realistic, representational drama is based on a view of the theatre similar to that held half a century earlier by Apollinaire, who wrote, in the prologue to his Les Mamelles de Tirésias,

Car le théâtre ne doit pas être un art en trompe-l'oeil

Il est juste que le dramaturge se serve
De tous les mirages qu'il a à sa disposition

· · ·
Il est juste qu'il fasse parler les foules les objets
inanimés
S'il lui plaît
Et qu'il ne tienne pas plus compte du temps
Que de l'espace

Son univers est sa pièce
A l'intérieur de laquelle il est le dieu créateur
Qui dispose à son gré
Les sons les gestes les démarches les masses les couleurs
Non pas dans le seul but
De photographier ce que l'on appelle une tranche de vie
Mais pour faire surgir la vie même dans toute sa vérité
Car la pièce doit être un univers complet
Avec son créateur
C'est-à-dire la nature même
Et non pas seulement
La représentation d'un petit morceau
De ce qui nous entoure ou de ce qui s'est jadis passé¹⁰

Like Apollinaire, Beckett, Pinter and Ionesco reject the notion that drama must attempt to reproduce, in an exact, almost photographic manner, the everyday, external realities of life. A play is no longer

seen as a "slice of life"; verisimilitude is no longer a goal for the dramatist to strive for. Furthermore, they no longer believe that their audience must be convinced that it is witnessing real events, that the actors on the stage are really the characters whose roles they assume, rather than just actors. The imitative approach to the theatre is rejected, in the first place, because it is shallow. By reproducing the external realities of our lives, by accumulating realistic details, the playwright succeeds only in dealing with surfaces. In the second place, it is based on falsehood and trickery. No matter how much a play attempts to imitate life, it is not life itself. It is still a play that has been conceived by an author, and that has been ordered and structured in a way that "real" life never is. Actors remain actors regardless of how hard they try to conceal their own identities behind those of dramatic personae. The more realistic a play and its production attempt to be, the more apparent this falseness becomes. Ionesco cites the falseness and trickery implicit in realistic theatre as the main reason for his disgust with it:

Je ne comprenais pas comment l'on pouvait être comédien Il me semblait que le comédien faisait une chose inadmissible réprobable. Il renonçait à soi-même, s'abandonnait, changeait de peau. Comment pouvait-il accepter d'être un autre? de jouer un personnage? C'était pour moi une sorte de tricherie grossière, cousue de fil blanc, inconcevable.

Le comédien ne devenait d'ailleurs pas quelqu'un d'autre, il faisait semblant, ce qui était pire, pensais-je. Cela me paraissait pénible et, d'une certaine façon, malhonnête.
(Notes, 3)

To avoid the dishonesty of trying to fool an audience into thinking that the stage is the real world, that characters are real people, these dramatists do all they can to dispel the illusion. Thus the audience is often reminded that what it is watching is a play. Rather than trying to

hide theatrical effects, they emphasize them. This is what Ionesco terms "le grossissement des effets":

Si donc la valeur du théâtre était dans le grossissement des effets, il fallait les grossir davantage encore, les souligner, les accentuer au maximum. Pousser le théâtre au-delà de cette zone intermédiaire qui n'est ni théâtre, ni littérature, c'est le restituer à son cadre propre, à ses limites naturelles. Il fallait non pas cacher les ficelles, mais les rendre plus visibles encore, délibérément évidentes, aller à fond dans le grotesque, la caricature, au-delà de la pâle ironie des spirituelles comédies de salon. (Notes, 12-13)

This insistence on theatre as theatre, and not life itself, accounts for the deliberate unnaturalistic elements in their plays: such things as gross, even outrageous exaggeration of certain qualities in their characters and in the dialogue, ridiculous and unbelievable events, or, a common feature of Ionesco's plays, the mechanical, robot-like quality of characters.

A play that is no longer obliged to pose as a slice of the "real" world can assert itself as a unique and autonomous world, an artificial world, in the sense that it has been created by its author. Such independent worlds are the plays of Beckett, Ionesco and Pinter, as Oliver points out:

These playwrights want a drama that proclaims, "This is not life! It is my work of art about life!" or even, "This is life itself that I've created . . . man-made life . . . ersatz life."¹¹

The rejection of realistic, illusionist theatre has been accompanied by a rejection of the ideal of the "well-made play". The well-made play has a logical structure which has often been analyzed as consisting of five distinguishable stages: exposition, rising action, climax, dénouement, conclusion. In such a play, one event follows logically from another, all of them leading ultimately to a reasonable conclusion. In

the plays of Beckett, Ionesco and Pinter there is generally no exposition which sets the scene and introduces the characters. With the opening of the curtain, the audience is plunged immediately into the "action", if such a term may be used to describe plays in which, at times, very little seems to happen. There is also no climax or crucial event which could serve as a turning point, for in these plays it is difficult to ascribe supreme importance to any one event. All events - or non-events - seem to carry the same weight. The final effect of one of these plays is usually built up gradually by an accumulation of details. Instead of a constant progression in the action, there is often simply repetition of phrases and events. Furthermore there is generally no clear conclusion, no neat resolution to tie up all the loose ends and offer a explanation of preceding events. It is very common for all three playwrights to end their plays on a note of ambiguity. The audience is never told who Godot is and whether he will come, whether Clov will leave Hamm, why Stanley has been taken away by Goldberg and McCann and where they are taking him. Some of their plays have a circular structure: a play ends only to begin again. Either the whole play is performed once more, or it is implied that what has been happening will continue to happen, perhaps indefinitely.

The over-all structure of many of their plays are reminiscent of the structure of dreams or fantasies. The events that take place on the stage appear to be irrational, even impossible, and they may seem to occur haphazardly. This does not mean that these plays lack a principle of logical organization, but rather, as Oliver points out, that it is symbolic rather than overt:

At first glance some of their plays appear to be utterly illogical until we realize that the logic of the author's

thought is not directly expressed but rather symbolically stated in action.¹²

These playwrights' rejection of logical structure can be justified, for the well-made play is a falsification of life. Real events do not occur in a neat and logical manner, and they are not clearly directed toward a resolution. Things are far more likely to happen unexpectedly and haphazardly. Furthermore, the problem that these dramatists deal with cannot be neatly resolved, for there is no solution to the problems of the human condition.

Yet another departure from the realistic mode of theatre has been made in the area of characterization. The realistic conventions of characterization demand that the audience be made to know, and completely understand, quite a number of different characters. These characters must be convincingly "true to life", and they must have clearly-defined, distinct, and consistent personalities. The audience at least, if not the characters themselves, must be aware of the motivations behind their actions. Thus, in a very short span of time - the duration of the play - the members of the audience grow to know and understand the dramatic characters far better than friends they may have known for years, or even themselves.

Like Artaud, who opposed a theatre which concentrated on " . . . la vie individuelle . . . cet aspect individuel de la vie où triomphent les CARACTERES . . . " ¹³, Beckett, Pinter and Ionesco reject this approach to characterization. Their characters often lack fully developed, rounded personalities. They do not explain themselves to the audience, and the audience is rarely absolutely certain of who they are and why they behave the way they do. Their actions may appear to be irrational, unjustified or contradictory. But, as Pinter points out in an interview with John Sherwood, this approach to characterization is more honest, even more

"true to life", than that of the realists:

The explicit form which is so often taken in twentieth-century drama is . . . cheating. The playwright assumes that we have a great deal of information about all his characters, who explain themselves to the audience. In fact, what they are doing most of the time is conforming to the author's own ideology. They don't create themselves as they go along, they are being fixed on the stage for one purpose, to speak for the author, who has a point of view to put over. When the curtain goes up on one of my plays, you are faced with a situation, two people sitting in a room, which hasn't happened before, and is just happening at this moment, and we know no more about them than I know about you, sitting at this table. The world is full of surprises. A door can open at any moment and someone will come in. We'd love to know who it is, we'd love to know exactly what he has on his mind and why he comes in, but how often do we know what someone has on his mind or who this somebody is, and what goes to make him what he is, and what his relationship to others?¹⁴

Pinter's plays are particularly noted for the mysterious quality of their characters. They often seem to have no clearly-defined, consistent identities - thus the frequent references to certain characters by multiple names - and it is often impossible to ascertain the motivations for their actions.

Beckett maintains in Proust that there is no such thing as fixed personality that lends itself to rigid definition. The human psyche is in a state of constant flux. An attempt to define the identity of a character, in its entirety, on a stage, would be futile. Like Pinter's, the identities, origins and destinations of Beckett's characters are unknown, even to themselves. And a single character may appear to be a different person at a different period of time. Ionesco's characters, too, often lack consistency. They may behave in a wildly contradictory manner, or they may even undergo complete physical transformations.

These playwrights use their characters in various unrealistic ways. Their characters may be flat and two-dimensional, serving as allegorical figures; they may function as symbols, endowed with the kind of mythical,

archetypal quality that Olivier de Magny finds in Beckett's creations:

" . . . toutes elles sont vieilles d'une vieillesse étrange: la vieillesse, peut-être, de l'espèce humaine."¹⁵ They are often as strange and inexplicable as figures out of a dream or a fantasy. Or, in a manner characteristic of Beckett's plays, they may represent different parts of one consciousness.

Now that drama is no longer bound to be a mere reproduction of external reality, it is free to delve into what these dramatists - along with a few other avant-gardists such as Artaud and Genet - believe to be the true realm of art: the irrational, the subconscious, the mythical, the universal collective concerns and experiences of the human race.

Realistic, psychological theatre is a lifeless theatre. It has little significance or effect because it has lost its metaphysical dimension. Everything in it is too particular, too much dependent on time and space, too concerned with surfaces of things. Its power of impact upon the lives of its audiences is negligible. It is of this type of theatre that Genet speaks when he says,

Une représentation qui n'agirait pas sur mon âme
est vaine. Elle est vaine si je ne crois pas à ce
que je vois qui cessera - qui n'aura jamais été -
quand le rideau tombera.¹⁶

By trying to clarify everything, to fit everything into rational patterns, realistic theatre succeeds only in reinforcing habitual ideas. It does not strike or surprise us, it does not cause us to think or feel. Everything is domesticated and reduced to the comfortable realm of the known. Like Artaud and Genet, these playwrights do not believe the clear and the obvious to be the true realm of dramatic art. Rather than confirm habitual ways of thinking, the theatre should disrupt them, violently if necessary. A dramatic performance must stir us enough to have a profound

and lasting effect on our lives. In order to achieve this, the theatre must return to its metaphysical sources and its original functions. The purpose of theatre is to create myths, to delve into the dark and shadowy corners of man's existence where nothing is clear, to speak to his hidden fears and desires. In this way, theatre can achieve a universality that far transcends the spatial and temporal limits of realistic theatre.

Ionesco and Artaud make remarkably similar statements on this point.

Artaud says,

Créer des Mythes voilà le véritable objet du théâtre,
traduire la vie sous son aspect universel, immense, et
extraire de cette vie des images où nous aimerions
à nous retrouver.¹⁷

and Ionesco, "Il nous faudrait un théâtre mythique: celui-là serait universel." (Notes, 197)

The theatre must present general and universal human preoccupations rather than specific psychological, sociological, or moral problems:

" . . . son objet n'est pas de résoudre des conflits sociaux ou psychologiques, de servir de champ de bataille à des passions morales "18

The expression of these universal themes must not be so clear as to divest them of their power to disturb and affect the audience.

A theatre of this type addresses the total being of man, not just that part of him that is rational. It is not less "real" than theatre which is patently realistic: it simply deals with a different kind of reality, a less obvious one. But the internal irrational, mysterious aspects of man's world are as important to his life as the external and the rational. In fact, Ionesco maintains that fantasy and fiction are truer than reality:

J'ai . . . toujours pensé que la vérité de la fiction est plus profonde, plus chargée de signification que la réalité quotidienne. Le réalisme, socialiste ou pas,

est en deçà de la réalité. Il la rétrécit, l'atténue, la fausse, il ne tient pas compte de nos vérités et obsessions fondamentales: l'amour, la mort, l'étonnement. Il présente l'homme dans une perspective réduite, aliénée; notre vérité est dans nos rêves, dans l'imagination; tout, à chaque instant, confirme cette affirmation. La fiction a précédé la science. Tout ce que nous rêvons, c'est-à-dire tout ce que nous désirons, est vrai Il n'y a de vrai que le mythe (Notes, 4)

It is because of the views that Beckett, Ionesco and Pinter hold on the nature and purpose of the theatre that their plays have seemed so strange to audiences accustomed to realistic theatre. This accounts also for the vagueness and obscurity which critics have found in their plays. On the other hand, the validity of their dramatic principles is proved by the impact of their plays. Although the meaning of the plays is often not clear to audiences, they succeed in disturbing their viewers, in evoking a response. They seem to touch upon some inner chord in the consciousness of all but the most insensitive members of the audience.

The dramatic method of these playwrights is largely poetic. They rarely make any direct statements, relying mainly on nuance and implication. They often present ideas and emotional states through metaphors, symbols, archetypal images. They evoke moods and feelings. Like poems, their plays are often open to interpretation on several levels simultaneously.

All of this is true even of the plays of Pinter, which may appear, on the surface to be realistic because of their accurate reproduction of popular speech and habits. But Pinter's plays go far beyond realism. They are full of mystery and ambiguity, and behind the surface realism lurks a strange nightmarish world. Most of his plays create an inexplicable, but powerful, feeling of uneasiness, fear and menace. They produce the metaphysical shudder that Artaud considered so important

to theatre.

The final plane upon which these playwrights' revolt against established theatre will be considered is that of traditional classification of drama into genres. Just as other clear distinctions and absolutes of the past are no longer valid, neither is the rigid separation of tragedy, comedy and farce. In the eyes of these dramatists, man and his predicament are neither exclusively comic nor exclusively tragic, but both simultaneously. The absurdity of man's condition, his helplessness, his ignorance may appear to be comic, but the laughter ceases with the realization that man is permanently condemned to this state of affairs. If the works of these playwrights are to be classified into a genre, a new name must be found for it, for the old categories are no longer viable. Coe uses a suitable term, "la farce tragique".¹⁹ The substance of these plays is essentially tragic, but it is presented in a comical, even farcical manner. This mixture of tragedy and farce is not like that which we find, for example, in some of Shakespeare's tragedies, where tragic scenes are interspersed with occasional farcical scenes to provide comic relief, or contrast, or comment on previous scenes. Here the comic and tragic elements are co-existent and fully integrated. This constant integration of moods is not always immediately apparent. To a less perceptive member of the audience, Pinter's and Ionesco's plays may at first appear to be no more than farces, despite the darkness and menace lurking behind the apparent humour. On the other hand, many have accused Beckett of presenting plays of unmitigated gloom, in spite of the abundance of genuine humour to be found in his works.

Humour, as Ionesco often tells us in Notes and contre-notes, is a liberating force. It is a way of dealing with a hostile world. At the

grimmiest moments, laughter can prevent total despair by helping one to maintain a sense of perspective and balance.

But not all of the humour that is so abundant in these plays is lighthearted and gay. It may often be of the grotesque or black variety. There is a tendency in these plays towards lower forms of comedy, farce. Farce is not as gay or innocent as one might think. It is basically a cruel, vicious, even sadistic form of humour. No pity is shown to the helpless victim of farce. He is forced to endure constant punishment and humiliation. Whereas in tragedy, in spite of his suffering, the dignity and stature of the protagonist are raised, in farce they are mercilessly reduced. Thus farce need not be more cheerful or optimistic than tragedy - it may be even less so.

In view of these dramatists' vision of man and his condition, "la farce tragique" is a most suitable dramatic form. As Coe sums it up,

En vérité, la farce tragique est peut-être la forme dramatique la plus caractéristique, la plus significative du XX^e siècle; car, tandis que ce qui est tragédie ôte à la farce son innocence et au rire sa désinvolture, ce qui est farce ôte à la tragédie cette noblesse et cette dignité attachée à l'idéal de l'homme antique.²⁰

The preceding two chapters have outlined the general common tendencies toward revolt to be found in the plays of Beckett, Ionesco and Pinter. To analyze these tendencies more specifically, we will now turn to the plays themselves. One play by each author will be examined in some of the aspects of the theory of revolt that has just been presented. The plays that will be considered are Pinter's The Birthday Party, Beckett's Fin de partie, and Ionesco's Le Roi se meurt.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Serge Doubrovsky, "Le Rire d'Eugène Ionesco," La Nouvelle Revue Française, 8 (1960), 314-15.
- 2 Jean Genet, Les Bonnes (Sceaux: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1954), p. 11.
- 3 Antonin Artaud, Le Théâtre et son double, in Oeuvres complètes, IV (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 45.
- 4 Ibid., p. 45.
- 5 Ibid., p. 50.
- 6 T. S. Eliot, "The Beating of a Drum," The Nation and the Athenaeum, 34 (6 Oct. 1923), 12; cited by R. W. F. Wilcocks, "The Theater as Ritual," in The Theater of Jean Genet: A Casebook, ed. Richard N. Coe (New York: Grove Press, 1970), p. 201.
- 7 Genet, pp. 14-15.
- 8 For a full-scale discussion of Pinter's plays as ritual, see Katherine H. Burkman, The Dramatic World of Harold Pinter: Its Basis in Ritual (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1971).
- 9 William I. Oliver, "Between Absurdity and the Playwright," in Modern Drama: Essays in Criticism, ed. Travis Bogard and William I. Oliver (London, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 6.
- 10 Guillaume Apollinaire, Les Mamelles de Tirésias, in Oeuvres Poétiques (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), p. 882.
- 11 Oliver, p. 6.
- 12 Ibid., p. 7.
- 13 Artaud, p. 139.
- 14 Pinter, interviewed by John Sherwood, B.B.C. European Service, 3 March 1960; cited by Esslin, The Peopled Wound, p. 31.
- 15 Olivier de Magny, "Samuel Beckett et la farce métaphysique," Cahiers Renaud Barrault, No. 44 (1963), p. 71.
- 16 Genet, p. 15.
- 17 Artaud, pp. 139-40.
- 18 Ibid., p. 84.
- 19 This is the term used by Richard Coe in an article entitled "La Farce tragique," trans. Claude Clergé, Cahiers Renaud Barrault, No. 42 (1963), pp. 25-52.
- 20 Ibid., p. 52.

III. Harold Pinter: The Birthday Party

The first London performance of The Birthday Party was disastrous. It ran for less than a week (19 - 24 May, 1958), and its critical reception was almost unanimously unfavourable. One of its very few defenders was Harold Hobson who wrote, in his review in the Sunday Times:

"Mr. Pinter and The Birthday Party, despite their experience last week, will be heard of again. Make a note of their names. 1

Hobson's prophecy was soon fulfilled. The play was revived on May 1, 1959, and since then has been performed numerous times both sides of the Atlantic. In 1960, The Birthday Party was televised; in 1968 the film version of the play opened in New York.

The Birthday Party is Pinter's first three-act play. Like most of his other works, it is full of ambiguities and rich in suggestions, for which no explanations are provided. The following vague statement is as clear an interpretation as Pinter is willing to give of his play:

I don't know who Goldberg and McCann are, apart from being Goldberg and McCann. Monty is a fact. All we know about Stanley's past is what he says about it, and that can't be the whole truth. He has lived and has a past, but what he says is all he can say of it. Not every fact is an accurate assessment of what has taken place, but some facts have to be faced. What Stanley says about his concert is based on fact, and, for my money, Goldberg and McCann have come down to get Stanley.²

Thus, Pinter is as unwilling as is Beckett to explain his own works. This reluctance is humourously illustrated in the following anecdote, related by Martin Esslin:

When he recieved a letter which read: "Dear Sir, I would be obliged if you would kindly explain to me the meaning of your play The Birthday Party. These are the points which I do not understand: 1. Who are the two men? 2. Where did Stanley come from? 3. Were they all supposed to be normal? You will appreciate that without the answers to my questions I cannot fully understand your play". Pinter is

said to have replied as follows: "Dear Madam, I would be obliged if you would kindly explain to me the meaning of your letter. These are the points which I do not understand: 1. Who are you? 2. Where do you come from? 3. Are you supposed to be normal? You will appreciate that without the answers to my questions I cannot fully understand your letter."³

Pinter is not simply indulging in obscurity for its own sake, for the types of plays that he writes do not lend themselves to clear-cut explanations. Their effect depends more upon the atmosphere, and the feeling created by the accumulation of events, than upon the events themselves. Thus, in The Birthday Party, the uncomfortable, menacing feeling that slowly develops as the play progresses is more important than the plot.

Because of the deliberate vagueness of The Birthday Party, a number of interpretations of the play can be, and have been, put forward. The basic situation is quite straightforward; it is one that recurs in Pinter's plays: the comfortable security of the main character is suddenly and violently disrupted by an outside force. But the details of characters and events are less clear. Who is Stanley? Why is he hiding in the boarding-house? Who are Goldberg and McCann and why are they after Stanley? Where do they take him at the end? The answers to these questions may vary considerably. A brief look at some of the possible interpretations of The Birthday Party will give an indication of the richness of the play.

Perhaps The Birthday Party is a play about political oppression. Stanley may have committed some crime against the state, and Goldberg and McCann may be members of a secret police force, whose duty it is to seek him out, interrogate him and finally intern him.

Or The Birthday Party may be a play about organized crime. Goldberg

and McCann are in many ways reminiscent of the pair of thugs in The Dumb Waiter: They are violent, they seem to be acting on the orders of some higher authority, they refer to their assignment as a "job". Stanley would then appear to have been a former member of the organization, who has betrayed it - either by informing or just deserting - and must now be punished.

The play could be seen as dealing with insanity, in particular, paranoia. Stanley would then be an escapee from an insane asylum, and Goldberg and McCann, who come in a van to fetch him, employees of the asylum. There are many indications that Stanley is not entirely normal, and the whole play is pervaded with an atmosphere of paranoia. Stanley tells dubious stories about his past, he easily loses control of himself, he is convinced that some anonymous forces are out to get him: "they" are after him; "they" ruined his musical career.

A Freudian interpretation of The Birthday Party has been favoured by a number of critics, including Lois Gordon who explains the play in this way:

In an effort to deny an amorous relationship with his mother, whereupon he usurped his father's place in the household, Stanley has moved to a new land and became the hopeful son of his present family. In doing this, however, Stanley has similarly and unknowingly displaced the present father to establish a lover-son relationship with his wife. Not until his confrontation with Goldberg and McCann does Stanley admit his sin and suffer a kind of internal purgation. The Birthday Party builds upon the Freudian interpretation of the Oedipus myth.⁴

It is true that Stanley has a mother-son relationship with Meg, and that the relationship is tinged with strong erotic overtones. He often behaves like a spoiled child, and, when Goldberg and McCann arrive, he requires reassurance that his favorite child status will not be usurped by the

new-comers. His experiences after their arrival may thus be viewed as a process of growing up.

It is possible to interpret The Birthday Party in terms of guilt. This would be the sort of nameless, general guilt that pervades the works of Kafka (especially The Trial), to whom Pinter is often compared, and whom he has acknowledged as one of his favourite writers.⁵ Goldberg and McCann would thus function as concrete manifestations of Stanley's own fears and feelings of guilt. In his poem about The Birthday Party, entitled "A View of the Party", Pinter indicates that Goldberg and McCann are at least to some extent manifestations of thoughts rather than concrete human beings:

The thought that Goldberg was
Sat in the centre of the room,
A man of weight and time,
To supervise the game.

The thought that was McCann
Walked in upon this feast,
A man of skin and bone
With a green stain on his chest.⁶

Stanley is obsessed with a variety of guilt feelings, which Goldberg and McCann bring to the surface. During the interrogation sequence, nearly all of the questions they ask him are framed as accusations. However absurd and contradictory they may be, they are geared to arouse feelings of guilt. They touch on guilt feelings that he has about himself: he is in everybody's way, he is a washout, he mistreats others, he is a traitor. It does not matter that most of these accusations are ridiculous and often contradict each other, for people's feelings of guilt are generally irrational.⁷

Another commonly-accepted way of interpreting The Birthday Party is in terms of a conflict between society and the individual. Tom Milne

summarizes it in this way:

The individual, unable to come to terms with society,
unable or unwilling to place his ideals at its service,
is crushed by society.⁸

Stanley may thus be seen as a rebel against the social system. He is an artist (he plays the piano), who has tried to opt out of society, only to be forced back into it by Goldberg and McCann, representatives of the system.⁹ Stanley lead an unconventional life: he chooses to avoid contact with society, he accepts no responsibilities, he neglects his personal appearance. As a Jew and an Irish Catholic, Goldberg and McCann represent the conservative forces in society. Goldberg in particular constantly mouths all the clichés and platitudes of conventional society. Thus the forces of society, represented by Goldberg and McCann do not permit Stanley to pursue his irresponsible, unconventional, life-style. They bear down on him and violently force him back into the mold. His "conversion" is indicated by his proper dress at the end of the play, and his accompanying loss of creativity is shown by his blindness and his inability to speak.

It is clear that The Birthday Party can be understood on a number of different levels. Some of the interpretations that have been offered are simple and superficial, for example, a story of crime and criminals; others are more complex and profound: a development of the archetypal Oedipus myth, a study of the nature of guilt; but no one of these fully accounts for all the subtle nuances and the suggestive power of the play. On the deepest and most complex level, The Birthday Party is a statement about the human condition and man's attempt to revolt against it. It is this level of interpretation, which can be termed the metaphysical, that will be considered in detail. The metaphysical interpretation of The Birthday Party does not necessarily negate all of the others.

Regardless of how the play is interpreted, one cannot deny, for example, that it contains an Oedipal situation, or that guilt is an important theme. The fact that various levels of meaning co-exist in the play attests to its richness and complexity.

The metaphysical interpretation of The Birthday Party links it to Beckett's Fin de partie and Ionesco's Le Roi se meurt. All three plays should have been included in Esslin's statement that,

The play The Birthday Party would then, like Beckett's Endgame, emerge as a morality about the process of death itself, a kind of modern Everyman.¹⁰

The Birthday Party shows the gradual disintegration and destruction of a man - Stanley, a modern Everyman, - through the power of an irresistible, exterior force - Goldberg and McCann, agents of death - against which he tries, unsuccessfully, to revolt. Like Beckett's Hamm, and Ionesco's Béranger, Stanley is not a heroic character. He is stubborn, selfish, sadistic, and given to fits of temper. In these plays, man is no longer shown in his noblest form, as he was in the tragedies of former times. Nevertheless, we feel a great deal of sympathy for Stanley, and the others, perhaps because they are so much like us.

Pinter's play opens on a life of numbing routine. For over a year Stanley has enjoyed the cosy security of the seedy boarding-house; the warm, if somewhat crushing, parental protection of Meg and Petey. Completely sheltered from the outside world that he fears to face, he lives in a state of bad faith. He chooses to evade, rather than confront, the basic issues of his own life and the human condition in general. His extreme reluctance to face any problems is made clear by his repeated statements of preference for a quiet life with minimal contact with the world around him. He tells McCann,

I used to live very quietly - played records, that's about all. Everything delivered to the door. . . . I lived so quietly. (BP, 40)

But Stanley is not permitted to remain in his state of comfortable security. For him, as for all men, there comes a time when he has to face - when he is forced violently to face - some of the unpleasant aspects of the human condition, including death itself. The Birthday Party focuses on that stage of Stanley's life when the numbness of habit is violently disrupted, and " . . . the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being."¹¹

The first dark note in a play that up to this point has been pure comedy is struck when Stanley, "putting his head in his hands" in a gesture of despair, cries out, "Oh God, I'm tired." (BP, 18) Like Beckett's Hamm, Stanley is weary at the start of day, weary of his life, perhaps. This dark strain is picked up, more strongly, a little later, when Stanley, having heard of the imminent arrival of two gentlemen, frightens Meg with the story of the van. Here is the first hint of Stanley's approaching death:

They're coming today.

They're coming in a van.

. . .

And do you know what they've got in that van?

. . .

They've got a wheelbarrow in that van.

. . .

A big wheelbarrow. And when the van stops they wheel it out, and they wheel it up the garden path, and they knock at the front door.

. . .

They're looking for someone.

. . .

They're looking for someone. A certain person. (BP, 24)

This passage is full of threatening images of death - a pursuit, a hearse, a coffin. One could at first dismiss Stanley's words as a sadistic attempt to frighten Meg, or as the ravings of a paranoiac. But

the subsequent events of the play bear out his story: two men do in fact come in a van and take Stanley away. So it would seem that even at this point he senses his approaching death.

There are further indications of his awareness of what is to come. Why, for example, does he react with fear verging on panic when he is first informed about the two anonymous gentlemen? He tries to convince Meg, and thus himself, that they will not come:

They won't come.

. . .
I tell you they won't come. Why didn't they come last night, if they were coming?

. . .
They won't come. Someone's taking the Michael. Forget all about it. It's a false alarm. A false alarm. (BP, 20-21)

Why should this seemingly commonplace occurrence - the arrival of two new guests - be referred to as an alarm? Furthermore, when Stanley sees Goldberg and McCann, he feels, in spite of McCann's denials, that they have met before. Could it be that death has a familiar face?

Goldberg and McCann are emissaries of death. They have been sent by some anonymous higher authority to remove Stanley from his life on earth. Perhaps their orders come from Monty, who may represent Death, or even God. Like other, similar agents of death - the streetcleaners in Camino Real who walk through the town with their wheelbarrows looking for people to cart off to their death, or the two gentlemen who take K. away at the end of The Trial, Goldberg and McCann are pitiless. Like death itself, they are brutal and violent.

Goldberg and McCann have an uncanny, familiar quality that strikes not only Stanley, but the audience as well. They inspire uneasiness and fear in us although we do not quite know why. The basic pattern of The Birthday Party corresponds to what William V. Spanos outlines as one

of the common archetypes of modern existential literature:

. . . the flight from a dark, threatening agent who pursues the fugitive protagonist into an isolated corner . . . where he must confront his relentless pursuer¹²

This archetypal, symbolic pattern, he says, "is the Greek myth of the Furies".¹³ Spanos goes on to attribute the pervasiveness of this myth in modern literature to its preoccupation with death:

. . . the myth of the Furies . . . constitutes something of an archetype in the literature of contemporary existentialism. This, however, should not be surprising. For more than any other aspect of the human condition, the phenomenon of death, as the existentialists observe, has always been the closest intimate of mankind. No matter how obsessively men have striven to outstrip death, the effort has been futile. Death demands that each individual face and come to terms with his mortality. It is, therefore, not difficult to understand why the human imagination has always, especially in times of crisis like the present, mythologized, that is, has made something of this terrible negation.¹⁴

Spanos' analysis provides a useful explanation of some aspects of The Birthday Party. It accounts for the archetypal familiarity of Goldberg and McCann, and explains their function in the play. Agents of death, they are indeed like the menacing, avenging Furies who relentlessly pursue their victim and violently force him to come to terms with his mortality. These modern Furies literally hound Stanley to death. They gradually break him down through their intimidations, through their interrogations, through the sadistic ritual of the party, until, helpless and powerless, he is forced to surrender to them.

Various reminders of Stanley's mortal state recur throughout the play. From the start, Stanley is somewhat reminiscent of a corpse. There is an unhealthy air about him: he is unkempt and unclean; he does not bother to get dressed in the morning. Goldberg and McCann speak of his corpse-like odour, and refer to him as to one already dead:

McCann: Who are you, Webber?

Goldberg: What makes you think you exist?

McCann: You're dead.

Goldberg: You're Dead. You can't live, you can't think, you can't love. You're dead. You're a plague gone bad. There's no juice in you. You're nothing but an odour! (BP, 52)

At the close of the play, Stanley is nothing more than a corpse. He has lost his ability to act, to see (his glasses have been broke), and to speak. As Esslin points out,

. . . Stanley's correct dress, his speechlessness and his blindness would be an image of him laid out and lying in state as a corpse.¹⁵

Stanley does not resign himself passively to his condition of mortality. Like Beckett's Hamm and Ionesco's Béranger, he tries to revolt against it. This revolt takes several forms. First he attempts to evade death simply by running away. Shortly after hearing of the two gentlemen, he suggests to Lulu that they run away together. But there is nowhere to go, for nowhere is one immune to death.

Stanley then attempts to appeal directly to one of death's agents, McCann. He justifies himself, he tries to convince McCann that he is on the wrong track. By ingratiating himself with the Irishman, he hopes to dissuade him from completing his mission. He says,

Look. You look an honest man. You're being made a fool of, that's all. You understand? Where do you come from?

. . .
I know Ireland very well. I've many friends there.
I love that country and I admire and trust its people.
I trust them. They respect the truth and they have
a sense of humour. I think their policemen are wonderful.
I've been there. I've never seen such sunsets.
What about coming out to have a drink with me?
There's a pub down the road serves draught Guinness.
Very difficult to get in these parts - (BP, 42)

This ruse having failed, Stanley now decides to fight back, to resist the two men, to assert his right to live. Turning threateningly toward

Goldberg, he warns him, "Don't mess me about!" (BP,44) In the battle for power that ensues, each side tries to assert its authority over the other: Stanley orders the two men to leave the house; they order him to sit. For a short time Stanley resists. He even has one brief moment of victory when he tricks them into sitting while he remains standing; but his triumph is short-lived. From the moment they force him to sit, his collapse begins. They now have him in their grasp, and the grasp will get stronger as the play progresses.

The process of Stanley's disintegration has now begun. The subsequent interrogation carries it still further. The extent of his disintegration is made clear by his next attempt at resistance. He now resorts to physical violence:

He is crouched in the chair. He looks up slowly and kicks Goldberg in the stomach. Goldberg falls. Stanley stands. McCann seizes a chair and lifts it above his head. Stanley seizes a chair and covers his head with it. McCann and Stanley circle. (BP,52)

Stanley can no longer speak: he can only grunt. He has been reduced to the state of a cornered animal who has no alternative but to turn and fight for its life.

In spite of his failure, Stanley emerges as the only admirable character in The Birthday Party. His revolt confers upon him a certain dignity that raises him above the others. Goldberg and McCann, on the other hand, are shown to be nothing more than a pair of heartless thugs, as they must be, for death itself is pitiless and criminal.

Who is responsible for what happens to Stanley? Goldberg and McCann clearly act on the orders of some higher power: they are agents, rather than authorities in themselves. This higher power, probably the mysterious Monty who is mentioned at the end of the play, may be the principle of death, or it may be God, as Pinter sees Him. If it is God, then

here, as in Beckett's works, He is exposed as a vicious, sadistic tyrant. "We're taking him to Monty" (BP,85) sounds more like a dreadful threat than a promise of everlasting joy. As Ruby Cohn points out:

Although Pinter's God-surrogates are as invisible as Godot, there is no ambiguity about their message. They send henchmen not to bless but to curse, not to redeem but to annihilate.¹⁶

The Birthday Party is universal in scope. Its theme is the ageless theme of death; its basis is the archetypal myth of the Furies. The menace that pervades it, the threat of death, hangs over everyone: not only all of the characters of the play, but every member of the audience as well. As a reminder that no one is immune to Stanley's fate, Goldberg and McCann threaten to do the same to Lulu and Petey. The unavoidable implication of the play, is, as James Hollis says, "Someone is coming in a van today to cart you away - to cart you away!"¹⁷

Pinter has often been praised for his talents as a realistic dramatist. In fact, early in his career, he was usually included in the "kitchen sink" school of British drama of the fifties, because of his ability to recreate accurately the speech and habits of the English working class. But Pinter's plays go far beyond the realistic reproductions of the social milieu, their over-all effect is not realistic. Pinter himself testifies that his intention is to transcend realism. He says, "If you press me for a definition, I'd say that what goes on in my plays is realistic, but what I'm doing is not realism."¹⁸

"Pinter's plays have an unreal reality, or a realistic unreality", says Bernard Dukore.¹⁹ While the details of character, speech and setting are accurate reproductions of contemporary English life, the plays have an extra, mysterious dimension that overrides the surface

realism. Pinter's characters begin as concrete, recognizable English types, but they become more bizarre and mysterious as the plays progress. They have a certain vague, shadowy quality similar to that of figures in a dream. Their identities - often even their names - are not clearly established. Nothing is known about their past histories except what they say themselves, and that is not the entire truth. They behave in strange manners, and the motivations for their actions are never fully explained. So there is a constant ambivalence, as Esslin says, "between the concrete reality of his characters and their simultaneous force as dream images, symbols, thoughts," ²⁰ In The Birthday Party the characters are not only familiar members of a certain social class, certain religious and ethnic groups, they also function as symbolic archetypal images of man, the Furies, death.

Pinter's theatre has often been labelled "the theatre of menace". In The Birthday Party, as in many of his other plays, the indefinable, threatening atmosphere of fear, uneasiness and menace that is gradually generated, finally overrides the realistically-detailed, individual events of the play. The events can be interpreted in various ways, as has been shown, but the atmosphere remains constant. By jolting us out of our feeling of security, by reminding us of the threat that hangs over our heads, Pinter fulfills Artaud's ideal of the function of theatre, which he defines as follows:

Nous ne sommes pas libres. Et le ciel peut encore nous tomber sur la tête. Et le théâtre est fait pour nous apprendre d'abord cela.²¹

In an article on Pinter's dialogue, John Russell Brown writes:

The originality of Pinter and other dramatists writing today lies in their belief that gesture can be as eloquent as words. In this some have been encouraged by the prophecies of Antonin Artaud. . . . Pinter's

'dialogue' contains gestures as well as words, must be seen as well as heard.²²

Although Pinter has not abolished the supremacy of the spoken word in his theatre, he has introduced into his works a number of purely theatrical, non-literary devices. Having had many years of practical experience in the theatre, Pinter has an instinctive feel for theatrical gestures that will be effective on the stage. One of the most effective and suggestive moments in The Birthday Party comes at the beginning of the second act, when McCann sits silently, tearing into strips a piece of newspaper. This unexplained, vaguely threatening gesture helps to create the overall atmosphere of fear and menace.

Peter Davison, in a lecture on "Contemporary Drama and Popular Dramatic Forms"²³ discusses the occurrence in contemporary plays of theatrical forms, such as the music-hall and pantomime. He focuses most closely on the music-hall monologue and the cross-talk act, both of which Pinter, like Beckett, uses quite often. Examples of both can be found in The Birthday Party.

The typical monologue of a music-hall comedian consists of

. . . long, rambling anecdotes, often involving himself and his family, frequently breaking the illusion with mumbled 'asides' . . . if one might call such lines 'asides', existing as they do within the framework of direct address.²⁴

Goldberg's numerous long, irrelevant monologues are exactly like this. They are always about himself and other members of his family, his Uncle Barney, his dying father, his mother, or his wife. They begin unexpectedly; having started to talk about something else, Goldberg suddenly, for no apparent reason, rambles into a story about himself and his family. Here is an example:

The secret is breathing. Take my tip. It's a well-known

fact. Breathe in, breathe out, take a chance, let yourself go, what can you lose? Look at me. When I was an apprentice yet, McCann, every second Friday of the month my Uncle Barney used to take me to the seaside, regular as clockwork. Brighton, Canvey Island, Rottingdean - Uncle Barney wasn't particular. After lunch on Shabbuss we'd go and sit in a couple of deck chairs - you know, the ones with canopies - we'd have a little paddle, we'd watch the tide coming in, going out, the sun coming down - golden days, believe me, McCann. Uncle Barney. Of course, he was an impeccable dresser. One of the old school. He had a house just outside Basingstoke at the time. Respected by the whole community. Culture? Don't talk to me about culture. He was an all-round man, what do you mean? He was a cosmopolitan. (BP, 27-28)

Echoes of the music-hall crosstalk can also be found. There is, for example, the following conversation between Stanley and McCann, which is reminiscent of the sort of dialogue commonly found in Beckett's plays: They begin by whistling "The Mountains of Morne" together; then during the exchange, one whistles while the other speaks.

McCann: But it is an honour.
 Stanley: I'd say you were exaggerating.
 McCann: Oh no. I'd say it was an honour.
 Stanley: I'd say that was plain stupid.
 McCann: Ah no. (BP, 38)

Pinter looks back to the origins of theatre by making extensive use of ritual in his plays. Nearly every one of his works is based on a ritual of some sort.

. . . from a birthday party to a homecoming, through seeking living-space, taking possession, or taking 'care' of a room, to taking breakfast or lunch, taking orders, fulfilling routines, visiting, collecting, and so on.²⁵

In her book on the ritualistic basis of Pinter's theatre, Katherine Burkman speaks of two basic types of rituals that commonly underlie Pinter's plays, trivial, daily domestic rituals, and sacred sacrificial rites. Within the context of The Birthday Party she makes the following distinction between the two types:

On one level occur the daily rituals - the paper, the tea,

the cornflakes; on another, the birth and death of Stanley, the sacrifice and the resurrection, the initiation into Monty's world.²⁶

The play begins with the everyday rituals of the boarding-house: Meg fixing breakfast for Petey, Petey reading to Meg from the daily newspaper, Meg taking tea up to Stanley's room, Meg going shopping. These are repeated in Act Three, at the start of yet another day. Their innocent, domestic rituals serve as a background to the more important and sinister rituals of breakdown and destruction. It is through ritual that Stanley is beaten down. He becomes a scapegoat, a victim of sacrificial rites.

The predominating ritual, around which the whole play is structured, is the celebration of a birthday. Although Stanley insists that it is not really his birthday, a party is arranged in his honour, at Goldberg's instigation. It may well be that Goldberg has seen in this occasion an opportunity to manipulate Stanley. Within the party itself another ritualistic event takes place, the game of blind man's buff. From both of these rituals, the guest of honour emerges as the victim. He is brutally worked over, both physically and emotionally, until, by the end of the game, and the party, he has been transformed into a terrified, hunted animal. This is how the party ends:

Stanley, as soon as the torchlight hits him, begins to giggle. Goldberg and McCann move towards him. He backs, giggling, the torch on his face. They follow him upstage, left. He backs against the hatch, giggling. The torch draws closer. His giggle rises and grows as he flattens himself against the wall. Their figures converge upon him. (BF, 65-66)

The process of Stanley's destruction has been completed. He will resist no more.

Much has been made of Pinter's ability to reproduce accurately, and ironically, the speech of the common man, with all its inanities and

absurdities. Much has also been made of his use of silence: all his plays, including The Birthday Party are full of significant pauses. Both the speeches and the pauses are similar insofar as in each case nothing is said but much is implied. Pinter believes that we are not so much unable to communicate, as afraid to do so. Both our speech and our silences are thus an evasion of direct communication, a "constant stratagem to cover nakedness."²⁷

Like Ionesco, Pinter believes that " . . . derrière les clichés, l'homme se cache." (Notes, 204) People use inane, cliché-ridden language in order to avoid having to think, having to expose themselves to others, and understand others. The most obvious user of this type of language in The Birthday Party is Meg. Her inane chatter at the opening of the play is extremely funny, but it is more than that. Since her speech is a reflection of her mental and emotional capacities, she is shown to be a woman who is incapable of any thought. Although she means well for Stanley, she does not understand him. At the end of Stanley's anguished description of his concert all she can say to him is "Aren't you feeling well this morning, Stan. Did you pay a visit this morning?" (BP, 23) Similarly, on the morning after the party, she prattles mindlessly about her success as the belle of the ball, completely unaware of what has been happening to Stanley.

The violence that is characteristic of most of Pinter's plays is generally conveyed through language. In The Birthday Party, we do not actually see violent acts committed on stage: Goldberg and McCann do not physically assault Stanley. But they destroy him, nevertheless, and they do it with words. Both in the interrogation, and in the chorus at the end of the play, it is through their steady stream of phrases -

mounting in pace and intensity - that they gain control over him. Just before he comes down for the last time, completely broken and helpless, we are told that he has been up all night, "talking" with Goldberg and McCann. Stanley is thus literally beaten down with words.

Pinter believes that "The old categories of comedy and tragedy and farce are irrelevant" ²⁸ His plays, like Beckett's and Ionesco's, combine both comic and tragic elements: they are "comedies of menace", in which essentially tragic material is presented in a predominantly comic form. What Pinter has written about the mixture of the tragic and the comic in The Caretaker applies to The Birthday Party as well:

An element of the absurd is, I think, one of the features of the play, but at the same time I did not intend it to be merely a laughable farce. If there hadn't been other issues at stake the play would not have been written As far as I'm concerned, The Caretaker is funny, up to a point. Beyond that point it ceases to be funny, and it was because of that point that I wrote it. ²⁹

The interrelation between comic and non-comic elements in the plays of Pinter and other modern dramatists, is thus outlined by Peter Davison:

If dramatic tension is to be realized to the full, the relationship of comic to non-comic must be finely balanced in performance.

In some plays, in Waiting for Godot, for example, this quality is maintained throughout. In others, the play may be predominantly comic at first, but then comic and non-comic may begin to demand of us multiconscious apprehension; occasionally the final resolution may be predominantly tragic as in Juno and the Paycock. It is this last pattern that is to be found in some of Pinter's plays. ³⁰

The Birthday Party follows such a pattern. The play begins as nothing more than farce. The ludicrous conversation between Meg and Petey, and then Meg and Stanley, at the start of the First Act, can only make us laugh. The first more serious moment comes when Stanley tells Meg about

his only concert, for here he is clearly suffering, but at this point the mood is still predominantly comic. It is only after the arrival of Goldberg and McCann that the emphasis of the play begins to shift. Their interrogation of Stanley, although comic by virtue of the absurdity of their accusation, is not comic in its brutality. We may still laugh, but we laugh uneasily. The change in mood from comic to tragic is gradual, and the comic never disappears entirely. There is some comic dialogue all through the play, but in the progression through the party and to the next morning, we find less and less to laugh at, and our laughter becomes less and less gay, until it ceases entirely. The play which had begun as farce, ends as tragedy.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Harold Hobson, Sunday Times, 25 May 1958; cited by Esslin, The Peopled Wound, p. 11.
- 2 Pinter made this statement in an interview during the filming of The Birthday Party; cited by James R. Hollis, Harold Pinter: The Poetics of Silence (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, and London and Amsterdam: Feffer and Simons, n.d.), p. 42.
- 3 Pinter, Daily Mail, 28 Nov. 1967; cited by Esslin, The Peopled Wound, p. 30.
- 4 Lois G. Gordon, Stratagems to Uncover Nakedness: The Dramas of Harold Pinter (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1969), p. 21.
- 5 About Kafka and Beckett Pinter has said, "When I read them it rang a bell, that's all, within me. I thought: something is going on here which is going on in me too." Interview with John Sherwood, B.B.C. European Service, 3 March 1960; cited by Esslin, The Peopled Wound, p. 29.
- 6 Pinter, cited by Esslin, The Peopled Wound, p. 80.
- 7 This interpretation of Goldberg and McCann as reflections of Stanley's own thoughts can be taken too far, if they are seen to have no power or motivation to act independently of Stanley. Lois Gordon is too eager to absolve them of all responsibility when she says,
On closer examination, however, these "menacing figures"
are not menacing at all. If anything, they are benign
and virtually indifferent observers upon the scene.
. . . Goldberg and McCann are simply two
businessmen visiting a seaside resort the so-called
victimizers are merely screens onto which are projected the
primitive and repressed feelings of the victims
(p. 5). Goldberg and McCann are obviously not just completely innocent bystanders. Pinter himself has indicated that Goldberg and McCann have come to get Stanley.
- 8 Tom Milne, "The Hidden Face of Violence," in Modern British Dramatists: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. John Russell Brown (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 41.
- 9 Both Martin Esslin and Bernard Dukore give this interpretation of the play. Esslin writes,
On one level it is fairly clear - particularly from the
final image of Stanley in the uniform of respectable,
bourgeois gentility - that Stanley is the artist whom
society claims back from a comfortable, bohemian, "opt-
out" existence. This, it seems, is possible because he
is an artist who has doubts about his creative ability
Esslin, The Peopled Wound, p. 82. And Dukore says, "It is the artist,

however, who by the very nature of his profession seeks individual self-expression and who is therefore a threat to the society around him. The subjection of the artist by the pressures of conformity is the chief concern of The Birthday Party." Bernard Dukore, "The Theatre of Harold Pinter," Tulane Drama Review, 6, 3 (1962), 51.

- 10 Esslin, The Peopled Wound, p. 82.
- 11 Beckett, Proust, p. 8.
- 12 William V. Spanos, "Abraham, Sisyphus, and the Furies: Some Introductory Notes on Existentialism," in A Casebook on Existentialism, ed. William V. Spanos (New York: Thomas Crowell, 1966), p. 10.
- 13 Ibid., p. 10.
- 14 Ibid., p. 13.
- 15 Esslin, The Peopled Wound, p. 83.
- 16 Ruby Cohn, "The World of Harold Pinter," Tulane Drama Review, 6, 3 (1962), 68.
- 17 Hollis, p. 43.
- 18 Pinter, "Writing for Myself," Twentieth Century, 169 (1961), 174; cited by Katherine Burkman, The Dramatic World of Harold Pinter, p. 3.
- 19 Dukore, p. 45.
- 20 Esslin, The Peopled Wound, pp. 80-81.
- 21 Artaud, Le Théâtre et son double, p. 95.
- 22 John Russell Brown, "Dialogue in Pinter and Others," in Modern British Dramatists, pp. 140-41.
- 23 Peter Davison, "Contemporary Drama and Popular Dramatic Forms," in Aspects of the Drama and the Theatre (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1965).
- 24 Ibid., p. 160.
- 25 John Russell Brown, Introduction to Modern British Dramatists, pp. 10-11.
- 26 Burkman, p. 39.
- 27 Pinter, cited by Hollis, p. 15.
- 28 Pinter, cited by Hinchliffe, Harold Pinter, p. 37.
- 29 Pinter, Sunday Times, 14 Aug. 1960; cited by Esslin, p. 45.
- 30 Davison, p. 180.

IV. Samuel Beckett: Fin de partie

Samuel Beckett's second major play, Fin de partie, appeared in 1957. It was translated into English, by the author, under the title Endgame. The play had its première in French at the Royal Court Theatre in London under the direction of Roger Blin, on April 3, 1957.

Beckett has been as unwilling to offer explanations for this play as for all his other works. In a letter to Alan Schneider, dated December 29, 1957, he wrote,

But when it comes to journalists I feel the only line is to refuse to be involved in exegesis of any kind. And to insist on the extreme simplicity of dramatic situation and issue. If that's not enough for them, and it obviously isn't, it's plenty for us, and we have no elucidations to offer of mysteries that are all of their making. My work is a matter of fundamental sounds (no joke intended) made as fully as possible, and I accept responsibility for nothing else. If people want to have headaches among the overtones, let them. And provide their own aspirin. Hamm as stated, and Clov as stated, together as stated, nec tecum nec sine te, in such a place, and in such a world, that's all I can manage, more than I could.¹

As the author anticipated, his own reticence about the play has not prevented the critics from trying a hand at exegesis. Vast numbers of critical articles have been written offering a wide range of interpretations of Fin de partie, including the religious: for example, Ruby Cohn: " . . . the play may be interpreted as a bitterly ironic version of creation and resurrection"²; the psychoanalytic: " . . . Hamm has a number of traits which can be seen as schizophrenic."³; the philosophical: "Its value as a theatre piece . . . is but secondary to its value as a literary, and . . . philosophical document; as such it must eventually be assessed."⁴, and others.

It is not surprising that numerous interpretations of Fin de partie

have been offered, for it is a play of great complexity, and is thus capable of being understood on a number of levels at once. Beckett leaves many questions unanswered. For example, one of many such questions concerns the four characters in the play. Are they concrete, independent human beings, or are they allegorical figures representing different parts of a single human being? They can be seen as one, or the other, or even both at the same time.

The setting of Fin de partie seems to be out of time and space. It is described as a refuge or shelter: a room bare of furniture in which the light coming from the two small windows is always grey. The time is always "la même que d'habitude", outside it is always "zéro". A number of references throughout the play suggest that this is the end of the world; it is at least the end of a particular world, that of the characters themselves. This vague yet suggestive setting conjures up a number of images, among them, as Bell Gale Chevigny has pointed out, that of a womb, a skull, and Ante-Purgatory.⁵

The most interesting of these images is that of the skull. In Roger Blin's production of the play the set was oval in shape to suggest a skull. The two windows then served as eyes looking out on the world, and the action of the play was shown to take place in the mind of one character, perhaps Hamm. It is certainly possible to see Fin de partie as among other things, a monodrama; as that which takes place within the mind of a single character at the time just before his death. This is suggested by Esslin:

The enclosed space with the two tiny windows through which Clov observes the outside world; the dustbins that hold the suppressed and despised parents, and whose lids Clov is ordered to press down when they become obnoxious; Hamm, Blind and emotional; Clov, performing the function of the senses for him - all these might well represent different

aspects of a single personality, repressed memories in the subconscious . . . mind, the emotional and the intellectual selves.

Is Endgame a monodrama depicting the dissolution of a personality in the hour of death?⁶

It has often been suggested that like Gogo and Didi in En attendant Godot, like Krapp and his tape in Krapp's Last Tape, Hamm and Clov represent two aspects of the same personality. Although Esslin sees Clov as the intellect and Hamm as the " . . . emotions, instincts, and appetites" ⁷, it seems more likely that Hamm in fact represents the mind, and Clov, the body. Hamm is the active intelligence guiding the actions of the other characters in the play. He is without doubt the dominant force in the strange household of the shelter. Far more than the other three characters, he seems to function in the realm of ideas: he is the dreamer, the artist. He can only think. His body is of no use to him, for he is blind and immobilized in his wheelchair. Clov's body, on the other hand, although it too is not in very good condition, is still able to move and function well enough to satisfy all of Hamm's physical needs and desires. As the body obeys the impulses sent to it by the brain, Clov always obeys the orders given to him by Hamm, although he does not understand why he does so. Clov functions on the physical plane: he does the domestic chores, takes care of the food, and is much more aware of physical sensations than any of the others. He constantly complains about the fact that he cannot sit, that his legs hurt.

In keeping with this explanation of the interrelations of the four characters, Nagg and Nell can be seen as representing the memories of this composite personality. They are extremely old and feeble, and all their talk is about the past. Thus they seem to be unwanted relics of the past shoved into the dustbins of the mind. They are repressed as

much as possible, yet cannot be prevented from popping up occasionally as unwelcome reminders of things preferably forgotten.

The strange names that Beckett has given to the characters of this play hold a clue as to what these people are meant to represent and their relationship with each other. Many interpretations of the names have been offered: Hamm and Clov as ham and cloves; Hamm as Hamlet; Clov as the cloven hoof; Nagg as one who nags, or as a term for a female horse; Nell as a name commonly given to horses. None of these are very useful. The most productive explanation of the names is that which is noted here by Ruby Cohn:

Several critics have pointed out that Clov is Clou is "nail", that Nell and Hagg derive from Germanic Naegel, meaning "nail." To these might be added the off-stage Mother Pegg, for a "peg" is also a nail. Latin hamus is hook, a kind of crooked nail, so that Hamm may be viewed as another nail. In this sense every proper name in Endgame is a nail

But Hamm is also contained in "hammer," which strikes at nails⁸

In relation to the other characters Hamm, the dominant member of the household who constantly orders them about, is the active hammer pounding the passive nails. But to some extent he too is a passive recipient, at the mercy of a more active agent or power. He knows that he is being acted upon, that something is happening. The only answer he gets to the question he asks a number of times, "Mais qu'est-ce qui se passe, qu'est-ce qui se passe?" (FDP,28), is "Quelque chose suit son cours." (FDP,28)

Whether they are separate entities, or parts of one entity, the characters in Fin de partie are, like most of Beckett's sets of characters, interdependent. Mind and body, hammer and nails cannot function independently of each other. Although the members of this family detest each other, they cannot do without each other. Clov hates Hamm, his tyrannical master; his greatest happiness would be to kill Hamm: "Si

je pouvais le tuer je mourrais content." (FDP,43); Hamm takes delight in bullying and tormenting Clov. Nagg and Nell have hated Hamm since he was a child; he, on the other hand, cannot bear the sight of them. Yet Hamm depends on Clov to administer to his physical needs and even to provide him with some semblance of affection; he depends on his parents to listen to his stories; Clov, Nagg, and Nell cannot survive without Hamm, for he provides them with food and shelter. As Hamm proudly reminds Clov, "Loin de moi c'est la mort." (FDP, 93)

Another significant suggestion contained in the name Hamm is that of ham actor. Like a ham actor Hamm wants always to be noticed and admired, to be the center of attention. In all that he says and does he is always conscious of playing a role. His manner of speaking is pompous, rhetorical, pedantic, as we see in his opening monologue: "Quelles rêves - avec un s!" (FDP,17) Like Winnie in Happy Days, Hamm delights in quoting from other literary works. For example, in the English version of the play he quotes from The Tempest: "Our revels now are ended." (E,56); at the end of the play he struggles with a line from Baudelaire's "Recueillement":

Un peu de poésie. Tu appelais - Tu RECLAMAIS le soir;
il vient - Il DESCEND: le voici. Tu réclamaïs le soir;
il descend: le voici. (FDP, 110-11)

He insists on having an attentive audience when he tells his story, even if he has to bribe Nagg in order to induce him to listen. Nothing pleases him more than to be begged to continue his story, while he modestly declines:

Hamm: J'ai avancé mon histoire. Je l'ai bien avancée.
Demande-moi où j'en suis.
Clov: Oh, à propos, ton histoire?
Hamm: (très surpris) Quelle histoire?
Clov: Celle que tu te racontes depuis toujours.
Hamm: Ah tu veux dire mon roman?

Clov: Voilà.

Hamm: (avec colère) . Mais pousse plus loin, bon sang, pousse plus loin!

Clov: Tu l'as bien avancée, j'espère.

Hamm: (modeste) Oh pas de beaucoup, pas de beaucoup. Il y a des jours comme ça, on n'est pas en verve. Il faut attendre que ça vienne. Jamais forcer, jamais forcer, c'est fatal. Je l'ai néanmoins avancée un peu. Lorsqu'on a du métier, n'est-ce pas? Je dis que je l'ai néanmoins avancée un peu.

Clov: (admiratif) Ça alors! Tu as quand même pu l'avancer!

Hamm: (modeste) Oh tu sais, pas de beaucoup, pas de beaucoup, mais tout de même, mieux que rien.

Clov: Mieux que rien! Ça alors tu m'épates.

Hamm: Je vais te raconter. (FDP, 80-81)

During the narration of his story Hamm never ceases to be conscious of his own style. He often pauses to comment upon it: "Joli ça", "Ça va aller" (FDP, 71), "Ça c'est du français! Enfin.", "Un peu faible ça." (FDP, 72)

A predominant metaphor in this play is that of a game of chess; from it derives the title, Fin de partie, or Endgame. Although none of the characters actually play chess on the stage, Hamm begins his first and last monologues with the words "A moi. De jouer." (FDP, 16, 110), and throughout the play the characters are involved in playing games of one sort or another. Even more than players, the characters of Fin de partie may be seen as the pieces on a chess board, as Hugh Kenner points out:

Nagg and Nell in their dustbins appear to be pawns; Clov, with his arbitrarily restricted movements . . . and his equestrian background . . . resembles the Knight, and his perfectly cubical kitchen , . . resembles a square on the chessboard translated into three dimensions.

Hamm, then, is " . . . the King, helpless, his moves confined (in his chair on castors) to one square in any direction" ¹⁰ Like the king in chess, Hamm is the least mobile, yet the most important member of the group; the others, particularly Clov, use their mobility to protect him and maintain his strength. The situation in Fin de partie

is in many ways similar to the endgame in a game of chess. The endgame is the final phase of a game of chess; here it is the final phase of the characters' lives. By the time the endgame is reached there are few pieces left on the board; in Fin de partie there are only four characters, and they believe themselves to be the last people left on earth. The position of these characters is as precarious as that of the few remaining pieces in an endgame; they hang on desperately although they know that they cannot last much longer.

The submerged metaphor of a game of chess in Fin de partie serves as an image of life itself. The game of chess has traditionally been used as a symbol for life - or death, if one loses the game - and it still appears in contemporary works, as for example in Ingmar Bergman's film The Seventh Seal, where Death challenges the Knight to a game of chess in which the stake is his life.

Fin de partie has been called " . . . the most abstract and metaphysical of Beckett's dramas " a "poème métaphysique sombre et inoubliable " ¹² Ronald Hayman has mistakenly called the play a failure because " . . . it insists on being taken seriously as a statement about the human condition." ¹³ Fin de partie is a serious statement about the human condition.

Beckett's view of the human condition is very grim indeed. The Cartesian dictum, "je pense, donc je suis" is transformed in Fin de partie into "I suffer, therefore I exist". Clov says of Nagg "Il pleure", to which Hamm replies, "Donc il vit." (FDP, 84) Beckett's - and his characters' - inability to accept the absurdity of the human condition is apparent in all of his works, from his critical study of Proust, to his latest plays, as Coe points out:

. . . it is in Proust that we find the first signs of that futile yet unquenchable revolt against the arbitrary factors of existence, which rises to the surface in Watt and finally comes to dominate so much of Beckett's thought - a revolt against the intolerable imprisonment of the sentient being within the determinism of cause and effect, of being and ending, of being obliged to end because something else is beginning, or obliged to begin because something else is ending; the anguished rebellion of the spirit against the insensate and meaningless limitations imposed upon it - the compulsion of birth, the worse compulsion of death - by a cosmos which is not to be forgiven merely because it knoweth not what it doeth.¹⁴

All of Beckett's characters suffer immensely because they are lucid enough to perceive the absurdity of their condition, and to revolt against it, yet are helpless to change it.

Fin de partie begins with reference to suffering, contained in both Clov's and Hamm's opening speeches. Clov declares, "On ne peut plus me punir." (FDP, 16), while Hamm asks, "Peut-il y a - y avoir misère plus . . . plus haute que la mienne?" (FDP, 17) The possibility of happiness is completely denied to them:

Hamm: As-tu jamais eu un instant de bonheur?
Clov: Pas à ma connaissance. (FDP, 84-85)

Life is indeed, as Beckett pointed out in Proust, an expiation for the sin of having been born. Both Hamm and Clov curse the fact of their birth. Hamm accuses Nagg of being responsible for this sin: "Maudit progéniteur!" (FDP, 23), "Maudit fornicateur!" (FDP, 24), "Salopard! Pourquoi m'as-tu fait?" (FDP, 65) Clov looks back with envy to the happy time before his birth:

Hamm: Oh c'est loin, loin. Tu n'étais pas encore de ce monde.
Clov: La belle époque! (FDP, 63)

Life for these characters has become a habit - a monotonous, tedious habit. They always tell the same stories, ask the same questions: "Toute la vie les mêmes inepties." (FDP, 64) They never cease to express their

weariness of it:

Hamm: Tu n'en as pas assez?
 Clov: Si! De quoi?
 Hamm: De ce . . . de cette . . . chose,
 Clov: Mais depuis toujours.

yet they know that they cannot hope for change: "Hamm: Alors il n'y a pas de raison pour que ça change." (FDP, 19) There is no possibility of change, at least not for the better. If any change at all takes place, it is a turn for the worse. Hamm explains the process of natural life as one of decay: "Mais nous respirons, nous changeons! Nous perdons nos cheveux, nos dents! Notre fraîcheur! Nos idéaux!" (FDP, 25) The progression in life from bad to worse is stressed many times throughout the play by Nell's elegaic expression, "Ah hier!", and Clov's cynical "Autrefois!". Clov, for example, says "Nous aussi on était joli - autrefois. Il est rare qu'on ne soit pas joli - autrefois." (FDP, 61)

The misery and suffering of the characters in Fin de partie is illustrated in a concrete way by their physical condition. Like many of Beckett's characters in his other works, all of the characters in this play are in some way mutilated and immobilized. Hamm is blind and confined to a wheelchair. Clov cannot sit, and moves only with difficulty, for he suffers from pains in his legs. Nagg and Nell are decrepit with age. They are limbless, and are confined to garbage cans. They have lost their teeth, and have almost lost their sight and hearing.

Hamm resorts to certain escape mechanisms in an attempt to relieve his suffering; his dreams and his pain-killer, which he is constantly demanding. These mechanisms of evasion help to make the grim reality of his situation a bit more bearable by allowing him temporarily to forget it:

Si je dormais je ferais peut-être l'amour. J'irais dans les

bois. Je verrais . . . le ciel, la terre. Je courrais.
On me poursuivrait. Je m'enfuirais. (FDP, 33)

But temporary escape does not solve the problem. Furthermore, neither of these methods of evasion is reliable. Hamm can dream only if he can get to sleep, which is not always possible. The supply of pain-killer is limited, and by this time, as Hamm learns to his horror near the end of the play, it has run out. His exits have been closed; he now has to face reality unaided. Hamm aptly sums up the human condition when he says, during the narration of his story, "Mais réfléchissez, réfléchissez, vous êtes sur terre, c'est sans remède!" (FDP, 73)

Who is responsible for the absurdity and meaninglessness of man's condition? Beckett is not an atheist in the strict sense of the word. While he cannot accept traditional religion, he is not able to completely ignore the idea of God. Several critics have noted the "obsession de Dieu"¹⁵ in Beckett's works. Both Richard Coe and Pierre Mélése make this point. Coe says,

The fact remains . . . that if Beckett is very far from being a Christian, he is equally far from being an atheist in any blunt materialistic sense. His people, without exception, are haunted and tortured by the idea of God. Do what they will, they cannot escape it¹⁶

and Pierre Mélése,

Beckett n'est pas un athée confortablement installé dans son incroyance; il lui faut constamment discuter l'existence de Dieu, détourner de leur signification les symboles qui ne cessent d'affluer à son esprit; aucune affirmation n'est possible, le doute est partout¹⁷

If God exists, and is thus responsible for the state in which man finds himself, what kind of being can He be?

Quel est l'être monstrueux qui a inventé une créature incapable de se connaître elle-même, et incapable de supporter de ne pas se connaître elle-même, enfermée sans raison apparente dans une durée aux limites insupportables?¹⁸

A God who would create a world into which man is born only to suffer in ignorance with nothing to look forward to but the absurdity of death must be a sadistic, evil being. Man's only recourse is to revolt against Him, to refuse to play His game, for

. . . the forces external to man - gods, fate, the world - are not indifferent, but sneering and malicious. They tempt him all the time. These forces are stronger than he. Man must be defeated and cannot escape from the situation that has been imposed on him. All he can do is to give up; refuse to play blindman's buff. Only by the possibility of refusal can he surmount the external forces!¹⁹

Whether God exists or not, He is unpardonable. If He exists He must be blamed for the misery of the human condition. If He does not exist, He is blamed for failing man by not existing. After the characters in Fin de partie attempt to pray, Hamm cries out in anger, "Le salaud! Il n'existe pas!" (FDP, 76)

If the only possible god is a malicious, sadistic, evil being, it is not surprising that Beckett's characters are less than admirable in their relationships to each other. They are only following the example set to them. As Camus' *Caligula* says, " . . . il n'y a qu'une façon de s'égaliser aux dieux: il suffit d'être aussi cruel qu'eux."²⁰ The best example of man made in the image of God in Fin de partie is Hamm. Like the only possible God, Hamm is a vain, selfish, sadistic, petty tyrant, an egomaniac obsessed with power. Hamm sees himself as removed from, and above ordinary mortals. Like God, he complains, "Ah les gens, les gens, il faut tout leur expliquer." (FDP, 61) He insists, unreasonably, on being placed exactly in the centre of the room, his "universe". He sees himself as the source of all life and death. As he never ceases to remind the other members of the household, that "Hors d'ici, c'est la mort." (FDP, 23), "Sans moi, pas de père. Sans Hamm, pas de

home." (FDP, 56) The image of the God that he reflects is that of a destructive, not creative God. Hamm's immediate reaction to any news of life around him - a flea, a rat, a child - is to order it exterminated. Like God, Hamm takes great delight in causing his "creatures" to suffer, and he needs to be reassured of the magnitude of the suffering he has imposed upon them:

Hamm: Je t'ai trop fait souffrir. N'est-ce pas?
 Clov: Ce n'est pas ça.
 Hamm: (outré). Je ne t'ai pas trop fait souffrir?
 Clov: Si.
 Hamm: (soulagé). Ah! Quand même! (FDP, 21)

His sense of power needs constantly to be reinforced. The posture in which he most likes to see others is that of supplication. He likes his creatures, whether it be his toy dog, or the man in his narrative, to crawl to him, begging for favours, which he can grant or deny arbitrarily, as God does, according to his whim.

In spite of all, the characters of Fin de partie manage to maintain their lucidity. They refuse to console themselves by accepting the human values that have traditionally given some meaning to men's lives. All of these values are ruthlessly rejected and mocked - love, honour, friendship, art, meaning itself - anything that can give some significance to man's life on earth. This mocking tone is set in the first few moments of the play with Clov's cynical "rire bref" that punctuates all of his initial actions, and is repeated often as the play progresses.

Although they suffer deeply, these characters are never allowed to assume heroic stature. Any time they approach a semblance of grandeur or sublimity, their stature is swiftly reduced. Hamm's grandiose statement, "Peut-il y a - y avoir misère plus . . . plus haute que la mienne?" (FDP, 17), is undercut by the fact that he yawns in the middle of the

question, and by his own answer to it: "Sans doute". (FDP, 17)

Love in this play is reduced to the attempts of two ancient, decrepit, limbless creatures, Nagg and Nell, attempting unsuccessfully to reach each other from their respective garbage cans. The mention of the very word "honour" is treated as a joke:

Nagg: Juré?
 Hamm: Oui.
 Nagg: Sur quoi?
 Hamm: L'honneur.
 Un temps. Ils rient. (FDP, 69-70)

Another favourite joke in the household involves the mere mention of contact with other people:

Hamm: Pas de coups de téléphone? On ne rit pas? (FDP, 25)
 Clov: Je vois . . . une foule en délire. Ça alors, pour une longue-vue, c'est une longue-vue. Alors? On ne rit pas? (FDP, 45)

Hamm, like many of Beckett's characters, is an artist of sorts - a writer, a storyteller. His literary attempts too are mocked. Nagg giggles constantly at his son's high-flown rhetoric. Hamm can secure an audience for his recital of his story only by bribing Nagg to listen to it by promising him a sugar-plum. If, in spite of this seemingly cynical attitude towards the value of art Beckett, and by extension his characters, continue to produce it, it is because Beckett conceives art as

The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express.²¹

Love between members of a family is also non-existent. Both fathers in the play, Hamm and Nagg, take great delight in the suffering of their sons. Hamm describes with relish the day when Clov will find himself in as bad a state as Hamm's present condition. Nagg, who is mercilessly

mistreated by Hamm, shows himself to be just as cruel, as he recalls the time of Hamm's childhood:

Qui appelais-tu, quand tu étais tout petit et avais peur, dans la nuit? Ta mère? Non. Moi. On te laissait crier. Puis on t'éloigna, pour pouvoir dormir. Je dormais, j'étais comme un roi, et tu m'as fait réveiller pour que je t'écoute. Ce n'était pas indispensable, tu n'avais pas vraiment besoin que je t'écoute. D'ailleurs je ne t'ai pas écouté. J'espère que le jour viendra où tu auras vraiment besoin que je t'écoute, et besoin d'entendre ma voix, un voix. Oui, j'espère que je vivrai jusque-là, pour t'entendre m'appeler comme lorsque tu étais tout petit, et avais peur, dans la nuit, et que j'étais ton seul espoir. (FDP, 77)

The very notion of human significance is mercilessly mocked. When Hamm asks hesitantly "On n'est pas en train de . . . de . . . signifier quelque chose?," Clov savagely replies, "Signifier? Nous, signifier! (Rire bref). Ah elle est bonne!" (FDP, 45)

Hamm, who occasionally displays a tendency towards sentimentality, is momentarily tempted to forfeit his lucidity and seek some consolation: friendship, and a sense of purpose. He asks Clov to kiss him, and before Clov leaves begs for a few words that he can keep in his heart: "Avant de partir, dis quelque chose Quelques mots . . . que je puisse repasser . . . dans mon coeur." (FDP, 107) He is even tempted to impose some meaning onto his life, to believe that all has not been in vain:

Et même sans aller jusque-là, nous mêmes . . . (avec émotion) . . . nous-mêmes . . . par moments . . . (véhément). Dire que tout cela n'aura peut-être été pour rien! (FDP, 50)

In every case, Clov's response undercuts Hamm's sentimentality.

It has already been suggested that Fin de partie may be a monodrama about the disintegration of a personality at the moment before death. It is certainly, like The Birthday Party, and Le Roi se meurt, a play about death. The whole play is pervaded with an atmosphere of

death, just as their whole world is pervaded with the smell of corpses, as a reminder that man is condemned to death:

Hamm: Tu pues déjà. Toute la maison pue le cadavre.
 Clov: Tout l'univers. (FDP, 65)

The world of these characters is one not of life, but of death. They seem to be the only life left on earth. New life will not grow: Clov's seeds will never sprout. That life which does manage to appear, a flea, a rat, a boy, is either eradicated immediately, or is left in the certainty that it will die on its own.

As there is no hope that the human condition will change the only release that men can look forward to is death. All the characters in Fin de partie seem to long for death. The play is full of expressions of the desire for the end to come. For example:

Clov: Fini, c'est fini, ça va finir, ça va peut-être finir. (15)

Clov: Cessons de jouer!
 Hamm: Jamais! Mets-moi dans mon cercueil.
 Clov: Il n'y a plus de cercueils.
 Hamm: Alors que ça finisse! (FDP, 102)

Hamm: Instants sur instants, plouff, plouff, comme les grains de mil de . . . ce vieux Grec, et toute la vie on attend que ça vous fasse une vie. Ah y être! (FDP, 93)

And yet, in spite of their seeming desire for death, every time it is suggested that they end their lives themselves, the suggestion is, paradoxically, rejected. They want death, and yet they hang on to life:

Hamm: Pourquoi ne me tues-tu pas?
 Clov: Je ne connais pas la combinaison du buffet. (FDP, 22)

Hamm: Tu n'as qu'à nous achever. Je te donne la combinaison du buffet si tu jures de m'achever.
 Clov: Je ne pourrais pas t'achever.
 Hamm: Alors tu ne m'achèveras pas. (FDP, 55)

Although death offers a release from the intolerable misery of human life on earth, death itself is part, the most unacceptable part, of

the human condition. To commit suicide would be to accept this most degrading aspect of the human condition. As Jan Kott explains,

. . . suicide makes no sense. Death exists in any case. Suicide cannot alter human fate, but only accelerates it. It ceases to be a protest. It is a surrender. It becomes the acceptance of the world's greatest cruelty - death.²²

Beckett's characters choose instead to revolt against their mortal condition by continuing to live in spite of all. Death will come anyway, since man always ultimately loses in the game of life, as Hamm remarks at the end of the play:

Vieille fin de partie perdue, finir de perdre. (FDP, 110)

Old endgame lost of old, play and lose and have done with losing. (E, 82)

The question arises, does death actually take place in Fin de partie? The play ends on a note of ambiguity: Clov prepares himself for his departure, and yet he stands at the door, immobilized, as the play ends. Nell seems to be dead, Nagg seems to still be alive, but in neither case can we be certain. The consensus of critical opinion seems to be that death does not take place, that the movement toward death has advanced but little, if at all, since the beginning of the play: Coe says,

The end is not check-mate, but rather stalemate, as inevitably it must be against an opponent as elusive as time As the curtain falls, Clov is about to go - but doesn't. Nell seems to be dead, but there is no real evidence. All, in fact, is as it was before. One millionth part of a grain has been added to the heap, and the heap is still unfinished.²³

Mélèse also believes that ,

. . . Hamm ne meurt pas, Clov ne part pas, Fin de partie est une pièce immobile, ou mieux, une pièce qui tourne autour d'un axe - la mort latente - et se retrouve au baisser du rideau au même point qu'au début.²⁴

Ross Chambers is of the same opinion:

Instead of nightfall, there is only a curtainfall. I do not agree with those who suggest that at the end of the play all is consummated, with the death of Hamm and his parents, and the departure of Clov. On the contrary, when the curtain falls, the characters are still as they have always been, that is, only about to die or leave. They have moved slightly closer to their goal: Hamm has taken the process of abstraction from the world a stage further by throwing away his whistle and his dog, Clov has got as far as putting on his panama and bringing in his suitcase, and when last observed Nell seems to be dead while Nagg seems to be alive. But as the play ends there is nothing to indicate that the curtain could not rise again on a scene in all essentials the same as the opening of the play, thus setting the whole play moving again in virtual repetition of itself, like Godot. All of this ending is conceived by Beckett with brilliant ambiguity that exactly mirrors the situation of people whose lives are over but still going on, who are part-way out of time but cannot attain timelessness.²⁵

Regardless of all of these critical opinions to the contrary, it seems more likely that Fin de partie does in fact end with death. By the time the end of the play is reached all of the things that have maintained the characters so far, their food and Hamm's pain-killer, have run out. Although we cannot verify that Nell is dead, she certainly seems to be. Nagg only seems to be alive; he may well not be, and if he is, he will obviously not be able to hang on much longer. Although Clov does not actually leave, for all practical purposes he is gone, for he no longer responds to Hamm. If Hamm is in fact the mind, and Clov is the body, then we can assume that death has taken place, for when the body no longer obeys the impulses sent to it from the brain, life cannot go on. Hamm's last soliloquy, and his last few actions, are full of indications that he now has to accept death. His quotation from Baudelaire's "Receuillement", "Tu réclamais le soir; il descend: le voici." (FDP, 111), suggests that the death that he was asking for has now come. Like Béranger in Le Roi se meurt, he strips himself of his possessions - his gaff, his dog, his whistle - in preparation for death.

In spite of all the seeming evidence to the contrary, the characters of Fin de partie manage to achieve a certain dignity. This has especially been noted of Hamm, of whom Nathan Scott writes, " . . . in the poised fixity of his disenchantment, he achieves something like a tragic dignity."²⁶ This is because they have the courage to maintain their lucidity, to refuse to evade their condition either by accepting comforting delusions, or self-imposed death.

En attendant Godot, when it first appeared, caught most drama critics by surprise. They did not know what to do with it, never having seen theatre quite like this before. Fin de partie is an even stranger play, even further removed from conventional realistic theatre.

It has often been remarked that Fin de partie is more like a poem, or a philosophical treatise, than a play, because here, as in En attendant Godot, nothing happens. Beckett himself has facetiously remarked upon this. Ruby Cohn tells us that

Beckett is rumored to have remarked that in Godot, the audience wonders whether Godot will ever come, and in Endgame they wonder whether Clov will ever leave.²⁷

It is true that Beckett rejects most of the conventions of realistic theatre with which audiences are familiar and comfortable. Fin de partie does not contain the basic elements of realistic theatre: character development, a complicated, action-packed plot. It is not, however, as Barbour claims,

. . . a shapeless affair, following the course of Hamm's apparently spontaneous ruminations, which seem as though they might as well have come in quite another order or ended sooner or later than they do.²⁸

Fin de partie has, on the contrary, a careful and definite structure.

It can best be summed up by the phrase that keeps recurring as the

leitmotiv of the play, "Quelque chose suit son cours." Although neither the characters nor the audience are aware of the direction in which the play is progressing, the progression nevertheless takes place. The play is structured on a process of gradual accumulation - key phrases and gestures are repeated and built upon to make the whole, like the grains of sand that add up imperceptibly to make a life. Each time one of these gestures or phrases is repeated - Clov playing with the ladder and the telescope; the constant queries about time and weather, with their invariable answer "Celle d'habitude"; Hamm's question "Qu'est-ce qui se passe?" Clov's reply "Quelque chose suit son cours"; their repeated desire for things to end at last - it carries more meaning that it did before, coloured as it is by its ever-widening context.

Although Fin de partie is repetitive and monotonous, it is not undramatic. As if following the precepts of Artaud, Beckett makes full use of the basic theatrical devices - clownery, pantomime, ritual - that have been virtually ignored by realistic theatre. Mélése points this out:

Neuf certes dans sa méthode et son expression, surprenant par l'insolite du dialogue et de la mise en scène, son théâtre n'en est pas moins traditionnel: par les arlequinades, les gesticulations burlesques, les types grotesques de ses personnages, et il s'apparente à la commedia dell'arte, aux parades de cirque, au cinéma muet 29

Those who accuse Beckett of being nothing more than a gloomy prophet of doom seem to ignore, or be unaware of, his great talent as a humourist. All of his works, although they present a very grim picture of the human condition, are extremely funny. It is true that much of his humour is savage and grotesque, what may be termed black humour. It is directed against man's weakness and his misery. Nagg and Nell laugh heartily as they recall the accident that cost them their limbs. Nell

sums up the essence of this type of humour when she says, "Rien n'est plus drôle que le malheur, je te l'accorde." (FDP, 33) The type of laughter that is evoked on these occasions is the third of the laughs that are discussed in Watt, the mirthless laugh:

The bitter laugh laughs at that which is not good, it is the ethical laugh. The hollow laugh laughs at that which is not true, it is the intellectual laugh. Not good! Not true! Well, well. But the mirthless laugh is the dianoetic laugh, down the snout - Haw! - so. It is the laugh of laughs, the risus purus, the laugh laughing at the laugh, the beholding, the saluting of the highest joke, in a word the laugh that laughs - silence please - at that which is unhappy.³⁰

But there is another type of humour in Fin de partie, that of pure comedy, even slapstick. Like Gogo and Didi in En attendant Godot, the characters in this play are remnants from the old clown tradition. Their make-up - very red faces for Hamm and Clov, very white faces for Nagg and Nell - reminds us of this. Clov in particular is given to clownish gestures. There is his often repeated pantomime of opening and closing the curtains, fetching or forgetting the ladder and the telescope, looking through the wrong window, dropping things, falling. There is his awkward routine of trying to kill a flea by pouring flea powder down his trousers, or hitting Hamm over the head with his toy dog. All of this is a gross and primitive form of humour that helps to lighten the solemnity of the play.

Theatre originally evolved from ritual. Fin de partie is based on a ritual, the ritual of a game of chess. The lives of these characters are filled with ritualistic actions that comprise their daily activities. The play begins and ends with formalized actions, as Ruby Cohn points out.

In the productions of Endgame, Clov opens the play by drawing the curtains at the two windows, and removing the sheets from

the ash bins and Hamm's armchair. These gestures are performed like a ritual, or a mock-ritual. Hamm's first gestures, too, are formal - his slow lifting of the blood-stained handkerchief from his face; his meticulous wiping of eyes, face, and the dark glasses that hide his sightless eyes; his methodical folding of the handkerchief before placing it elegantly in the breast pocket of his dressing gown. Just before the final curtain, Hamm removes the handkerchief from the breast pocket over his heart, and . . . covers his head³¹

Countless other rituals fill their day: looking out of the two windows, taking Hamm for a walk around the room, administering his pain-killer at a prescribed hour. Even their conversations are ritualized. Every day they ask the same questions, get the same answers. Nagg has told his story about the tailor hundreds of times, and Hamm's narrative is told every day.

Realistic theatre is illusionist. It tries to do all it can to convince the audience that what it sees on the stage before it is "real life" rather than a theatrical illusion. Instead of trying to create this illusion of "reality", Beckett, like Ionesco, does all he can to accentuate the falseness of theatre. He presents the audience with characters who, because of their grotesqueness, are not easy to identify with. His theatre is conscious of itself as theatre, and the audience is never allowed to forget that what it is witnessing is theatre, and not "real life":

. . . the verbal surface of the play is pervaded by a deliberate sense of artifice, which never allows an audience to forget they are watching a game played according to certain rules.³²

Turning his telescope onto the audience, Clov remarks, "Je vois . . . une foule en délire." (FDP, 45) All of the characters make obvious references to theatrical devices in order to point out that they are acting:

Hamm: Un aparté! Con! C'est la première fois que tu entends un aparté? J'amorce mon dernier soliloque. (FDP, 102)

Clov: C'est ce que nous appelons gagner la sortie. (FDP, 109)

Some of the references are clearer in the English version of the play:

Clov: What is there to keep me here?

Hamm: The dialogue. (E, 58)

Hamm: More complications! Not an underplot, I trust. (E, 78)

Like The Birthday Party and Le Roi se meurt, Fin de partie is neither comedy nor tragedy alone. It is a combination of the two genres; tragic in matter, and comic, even farcical, in manner. While it is full of farcical dialogue and gestures, it is more than farce because of the seriousness of its subject matter, but it is not classical tragedy, because tragedy of this type is not possible in a world devoid of absolute values. Pierre Mèlèse explains why this is so:

Mais le personnage de Beckett n'est 'tragique' ni à la manière de Racine ni à la manière de Shakespeare. Le héros tragique est entre les mains d'une puissance supérieure, que ce soit la Nature, le Fatum, les dieux antiques ou le Dieu des chrétiens. Le héros tragique - ou romantique - se débat en vain contre le 'destin qui l'accable', et la lutte qu'il mène, même sans espoir de succès, excite la crainte et la pitié, ou bien l'admiration, et les propose en exemple.

Mais lorsque l'échec n'est imputable qu'à un mécanisme absurde que nulle croyance ne peut expliquer, qui ne se justifie que par le fait même de son existence, dans l'engrenage duquel il est pris, irrémédiablement un jour ou l'autre - alors il n'y a plus de tragique 33

Thus for the serious modern playwright "la farce tragique" may be the only possible genre. Beckett's play differs from the other two plays in the way in which comic and tragic elements are integrated. While The Birthday Party and Le Roi se meurt undergo a subtle and gradual shift from predominantly farce at the beginning to predominantly tragedy at the end, Fin de partie maintains an approximately equal balance of the two at all times. This fine balance of the two moods is typical of

all of Beckett's works, both plays and novels.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Beckett, "Beckett's Letters on Endgame," in The Village Voice Reader, ed. Daniel Wolf and Edwin Fancher, 2nd ed. (1955; rpt. New York: Grove Press, 1963), p. 168.
- 2 Ruby Cohn, "Endgame," in Twentieth Century Interpretations of Endgame, ed. Bell Gale Chevigny (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1969), p. 41.
- 3 Ronald Hayman, Samuel Beckett (London: Heinemann, 1968), p. 29.
- 4 Thomas Barbour, "Beckett and Ionesco," Hudson Review, 11 (1958), 273.
- 5 Bell Gale Chevigny, Introduction to Twentieth Century Interpretations of Endgame, p. 25.
- 6 Martin Esslin, "Samuel Beckett: The Search for the Self," in Twentieth Century Interpretations of Endgame, p. 25.
- 7 Ibid., p. 25.
- 8 Cohn, "Endgame," p. 45.
- 9 Hugh Kenner, Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study, 2nd ed. (1961; rpt. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 156.
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- 11 Ibid., p. 99.
- 12 Pierre M  l  se, Beckett (Paris: Seghers, 1966), p. 65.
- 13 Hayman, p. 22.
- 14 Coe, Samuel Beckett, pp. 18-19.
- 15 Richard N. Coe, "Le Dieu de Samuel Beckett," trans. Claude Clerg  , Cahiers Renaud Barrault, No. 44 (1963), p. 9.
- 16 Coe, Samuel Beckett, p. 93.
- 17 M  l  se, p. 127.
- 18 Coe, "Le Dieu de Samuel Beckett," p. 18.
- 19 Jan Kott, Shakespeare Our Contemporary, trans. Boleslaw Taborsky (London: Methuen, 1965), p. 118.
- 20 Camus, Le Malentendu et Caligula, p. 166.
- 21 Beckett and Georges Duthuit, "Three Dialogues," in Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Martin Esslin (Englewood Cliffs:

Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 17.

22 Kott, p. 119.

23 Coe, Samuel Beckett, p. 96.

24 Mélése, p. 58.

25 Ross Chambers, "Beckett's Brinkmanship," in Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 160.

26 Nathan A. Scott, Samuel Beckett (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1965), p. 96.

27 Cohn, "Endgame," p. 51.

28 Barbour, p. 273.

29 Mélése, p. 132.

30 Beckett, Watt (New York: Grove Press, 1959), p. 48.

31 Cohn, "Endgame," pp. 44-45.

32 Anthony Easthope, "Hamm, Clov, and Dramatic Method in Endgame," in Twentieth Century Interpretations of Endgame, p. 66.

33 Mélése, pp. 132-33.

V. Eugène Ionesco: Le Roi se meurt

Le Roi se meurt which appeared in 1962, is one of four plays which feature a protagonist bearing the name Béranger. The others are Tueur sans gages, Rhinocéros, which preceded it, and Le Piéton de l'air, which followed. Similar to the other Bérangers by virtue of his role as a metaphysical rebel, the King Béranger is also quite different from them. He is not like them a naive "little man" figure, a "hero in spite of himself".¹ King Béranger is more of an abstract, allegorical figure, more of an archetypal symbol than any of the other characters of the same name, and the play itself is more mythical, and universal in scope than any of the others. For this reason, Le Roi se meurt may come closer than any of Ionesco's plays to fulfilling the author's ideal of the theatre.

Unlike Pinter and Beckett, Ionesco has spoken and written at length about both the theatre in general, and his own plays in particular. A reading of Notes et contre-notes, a collection of his essays and interviews, gives a very clear idea of Ionesco's theatrical ideals, of his opinion of the state of the modern theatre, and of his own interpretations of many of his plays. It also gives us a good idea of Ionesco's personal vision of the world, of his feelings about the human condition, which comprise the themes of his plays.

In his writings on the theatre Ionesco casually dismisses many of the great names in drama:

Corneille, sincèrement, m'ennuie. Nous ne l'aimons peut-être (sans y croire) que par habitude. Nous y sommes forcés. Il nous a été imposé en classe. Schiller m'est insupportable. Les pièces de Marivaux m'ont paru longtemps des jeux futiles. Les comédies de Musset sont minces, celles de Vigny injouables. Les drames sanglants de Victor Hugo nous font rire aux éclats; en revanche, quoi qu'on en dise, on a assez de mal à rire à

la plupart des pièces comiques de Labiche. Dumas fils, avec sa Dame aux Camélias, est d'une sentimentalité ridicule. Et les autres! Oscar Wilde? facile; Ibsen? lourdaud; Strindberg? maladroit. Un auteur contemporain dont la tombe est encore fraîche, Giraudoux, ne passe plus toujours la rampe; autant que le théâtre de Cocteau, il nous paraît factice, superficiel. . . . Pirandello lui-même est dépassé (Notes, 9-10)

Molière lui-même m'ennuyait. Ces histoires d'avares, d'hypocrites, de cocus, ne m'intéressaient pas. Son esprit amétaphysique me déplaisait. (Notes, 7)

The writers whom he most admires, and with whom he would like to align himself, are those whom he considers to be metaphysical in spirit and universal in scope: Sophocles, Aeschyles, the authors of the Book of Job and Ecclesiastes, Racine, Chekov, and, among contemporary writers, Samuel Beckett. The best example of his theatrical ideal is to be found in the works of Shakespeare, for "Shakespeare mettait en cause la totalité de la condition et du destin de l'homme." (Notes, 7) This is what Ionesco himself tries to do. As he repeatedly reminds us, it is the whole of the human condition, rather than just specific social conditions, that interests him. In order for a work of art to be universally valid, rather than just of passing interest to a limited number of people, it must be metaphysical rather than ideological; in other words, it must deal with the basic, immutable problems of human existence that are not altered by changes in social conditions, such problems as death, loneliness, fear and anguish. He says ,

Il me semble que la solitude et surtout l'angoisse caractérisent la condition fondamentale de l'homme. Et ce professeur qui pense que c'est une révolution économique et politique qui va automatiquement résoudre tous les problèmes de l'homme est un utopiste, et moins intelligent que mon perroquet. (Notes, 60)

Just as Pinter portrays people "at the extreme edge of their living"², so too Ionesco deals with them at the most basic level, where they are utterly alone, yet linked to all other men who experience the same

feelings of fear and anguish:

Mon lieutenant, rentré chez soi, ou mon patron, seul dans sa chambre, pouvait, par exemple, tout comme moi, extra-socialement, avoir peur comme moi de la mort, avoir les mêmes rêves et les mêmes cauchemars ou, soudain, avoir tout oublié de sa personne sociale et se retrouver nu, comme un corps sur une plage, étonné d'être là, étonné de son étonnement, étonné d'en prendre conscience, face à l'immense océan de l'infini, seul sous le soleil éclatant, inconcevable et irréfutable de l'existence. Et c'est là que le général et le patron s'identifient à moi. C'est dans leur solitude qu'ils me rejoignent. Et c'est pour cela que la vraie société transcende la machinerie sociale. (Notes, 89-90)

The central themes of the works of Ionesco, and of the writers whom he considers to be metaphysical, are often the most basic common-places of human existence. For example, the theme of Richard II (and of Le Roi se meurt) is

. . . la vérité éternelle que nous oublions à travers les histoires, cette vérité à laquelle nous ne pensons pas et qui est simple et infiniment banale: je meurs, tu meurs, il meurt. (Notes, 18)

Although these themes are so simple and familiar, and have been worked over by so many writers in the past, they are never exhausted, for they deal with problems to which no solution has yet been found, but which have to be faced by every man of every age. It is because Ionesco's themes are basically the same as those of the Greek tragedians, the authors of the Bible, Shakespeare, that he can claim to be, along with Beckett, a classical writer: "Finalement, je suis pour le classicisme: c'est cela, l'avant-garde," (Notes, 110), in spite of the unconventionality of his theatrical methods, which surprised and outraged so many of his conservative critics and audiences.

Although many of Ionesco's plays are farces, and all of them are at least predominantly comic, he is one of the most profoundly pessimistic writers of our time. The sombreness of his vision of the world is matched

only by Beckett's. The basic themes of Ionesco's plays are relentlessly grim, as Coe points out:

Leur thème constant, presque exclusif, est la mort et la crainte de la mort; les points abordés ensuite sont l'impossibilité d'appréhender le néant, l'anéantissement, de l'intelligence par la bêtise, de l'espoir par une résignation bestiale, de l'amour par le mariage, de l'idéalisme chez l'homme par la mesquinerie sordide chez la femme.

Il montre comment, dans la vie, dans le langage, dans l'oeuvre d'art, ce qui a un sens est finalement repoussé par ce qui n'en a pas; et comment, à tous les niveaux, l'esprit est supplanté par la matière.³

Ionesco is always painfully aware of the absurdity of the human condition, of the nightmarish quality of life:

. . . j'ai bien le sentiment que la vie est cauchemardesque, qu'elle est pénible, insupportable comme un mauvais rêve. Regardez autour de vous: guerres, catastrophes et désastres, haines et persécutions, confusion, la mort qui nous guette, on parle et on ne se comprend pas, nous nous débattons, comme nous pouvons, dans un monde qui semble atteint d'une grande fièvre; l'homme n'est-il pas, comme on l'a dit, l'animal malade, n'avons-nous pas l'impression que le réel est faux, qu'il ne nous convient pas? que ce monde n'est pas notre vrai monde? (Notes, 91-92)

The gap that exists between human expectations and desires and human reality is so great that life at times appears to be nothing more than a bad joke:

Nous sommes faits pour tout comprendre, nous ne comprenons que très peu, et nous ne nous comprenons pas; nous sommes faits pour vivre ensemble et nous nous entre-déchirons: nous ne voulons pas mourir; c'est donc que nous sommes faits pour être immortels mais nous mourons. C'est horrible et ce n'est pas sérieux. (Notes, 92)

If man's life is devoid of sense, so is his death. What is the point of human activity if it is all going to come to nothing, to end in the void of death? Ionesco has always been obsessed with feelings of fear and horror at the fact of death, as he says,

J'ai toujours été obsédé par la mort. Depuis l'âge de quatre ans, depuis que j'ai su que j'allais mourir,

l'angoisse ne m'a plus quitté. C'est comme si j'avais compris tout d'un coup qu'il n'y avait rien à faire pour y échapper et qu'il n'y avait plus rien à faire dans la vie.

. . . j'écris . . . pour crier ma peur de mourir, mon humiliation de mourir. . . . Ces angoisses ne peuvent être taxées de bourgeoises ou d'anti-bourgeoises, elles viennent de trop loin. (Notes, 204)

The lucid man who is aware of the absurdity of human life and death lives in a state of anguish. As long as a man is able to keep his eyes averted from the void by committing himself to some cause or goal that seems to give a meaning to his life, whether it be a religious belief, a political cause, or anything else, he may feel at ease in his life. But this is a false sense of security, an act of self-deception, a trap into which a man as honest and lucid as Ionesco refuses to fall, for he is " . . . a man obsessed with truth, for whom the 'comfortable lie' is anathema."⁴ He realizes that " . . . the lucid perception of meaninglessness is in itself a meaningful - the only meaningful - act."⁵ The lucid man finds himself in a dilemma: in the face of his consciousness of the absurd, what is he to do? He may react in one of two ways. He either fully accepts the absurd, in which case he has no reason to continue living, or he may refuse to accept it, " . . . knowing full well that it is the condition of existence, and therefore that revolt is again absurdity, raised to the nth degree."⁶ Ionesco chooses to take the position of revolt. He tells us again and again that the human condition is unacceptable.

Like their author, many of Ionesco's characters are metaphysical rebels. This is particularly true of Béranger, the protagonist of the later plays, whom Coe describes as

. . . an Outsider, an homme révolté, a metaphysical insurgent, rebelling first and foremost against the very absurdity of existence, but still more against the stupidity of those who fail to recognise it for what it is.⁷

Ionesco's characters refuse to submit passively to their absurd fate. They are constantly engaged in taking a stand against it, although their revolt is inevitably doomed to failure. In a world where the lack of love and communication seems almost to be the law, they fight for love and understanding (e.g. Amédée in Amédée ou comment s'en débarrasser); in a world where the mass of men is condemned to ignorance, irrationality, and brutality, they are determined to retain their reason and lucidity, (Béranger in Rhinocéros); in a world where most human beings are held down by all that is petty, sordid, ugly, they try to rise above to higher states of consciousness, where beauty and light predominate (Béranger in Le Piéton de l'air); in a world where evil exists gratuitously, they attempt to take a personal stand against it, to eradicate it (Béranger in Tueur sans gages).

The most daring and outrageous, yet at the same time most hopeless, attempt at revolt against the human condition occurs in Le Roi se meurt. In a world where the one absolute certainty in every man's life is his mortality, King Béranger tries to resist death.

Le Roi se meurt is more than just a play about the death of a particular man, King Béranger I. Ionesco widens the scope of this work in such a way that it represents the confrontation of every human being with the ultimate, inevitable fact of his existence - his death. Our reaction to Béranger's predicament is similar to Ionesco's reaction to Shakespeare's Richard II:

. . . lorsque, déchu Richard II est prisonnier dans sa cellule, abandonné, ce n'est pas Richard II que j'y vois, mais tous les rois déchus de la terre; et non seulement tous les rois déchus, mais aussi nos croyances, nos valeurs, nos vérités désacralisées, corrompues, usées, les civilisations qui s'effondrent, le destin. Lorsque Richard II meurt, c'est bien à la

mort de ce que j'ai de plus cher que j'assiste, c'est moi-même qui meurs avec Richard II. Richard II me fait prendre une conscience aiguë de la vérité éternelle que nous oublions à travers les histoires, cette vérité à laquelle nous ne pensons pas et qui est simple et infiniment banale: je meurs, tu meurs, il meurt. Ainsi, ce n'est pas de l'histoire, en fin de compte, que fait Shakespeare, bien qu'il se serve de l'histoire, ce n'est pas de l'histoire, mais il me présente mon histoire, notre histoire, ma vérité au-delà des temps, à travers un temps allant au-delà du temps, rejoignant une vérité universelle, impitoyable. (Notes, 18)

The action of the play cannot be pinned down to any particular time or place. Although the physical setting - a medieval castle - and the social roles of the characters - king, queens, servant, guard - suggest a time in the past, the play is filled with seemingly anachronistic references to modern technology, which situate it in the present as well. The characters of the play function more as universally valid allegorical figures than as specific people with well-defined personalities. Marie and Marguerite, for example, are not so much flesh-and-blood women as representatives of the two opposing principles of life and death. Béranger himself is not a particular man; he is any man, every man who has ever lived and who ever will live. His role as representative of the whole human race is clearly established in the guard's résumé of his "career", in which nearly all of man's greatest achievements are attributed to Béranger:

Majesté, mon Commandant, c'est lui qui avait inventé la poudre. Il a volé le feu aux dieux puis il a mis le feu aux poudres Il a installé les premières forges sur la terre. Il a inventé la fabrication de l'acier Monsieur l'Ingénieur a fait le premier ballon, puis le ballon dirigeable. Enfin, il a construit de ses mains le premier aéroplane. Bien avant encore, quand il était petit dauphin, il avait inventé la brouette Puis, les rails, le chemin de fer, l'automobile. Il a fait les plans de la tour Eiffel, sans compter les faucilles, les charrues, les moissonneuses, les tracteurs Il a bâti Rome, New York, Moscou, Genève. Il a fondé Paris.

Il a fait les révolutions, les contre-révolutions,
la religion, la réforme, la contre-réforme
Il a écrit L'Illiade et L'Odyssée. . . . Et en même
temps, monsieur l'Historien a fait les meilleurs
commentaires sur Homère et l'époque homérique. . . .
Il a écrit des tragédies, des comédies, sous le
pseudonyme de Shakespeare. . . . Il a inventé le
téléphone, le télégraphe (RM, 57-58)

The fact that Béranger is presented in the play as a king rather than a common man does not make him less representative of all mankind, for every man is king in a sense. He is king of his thoughts, his feelings, all the things that make up his personal, private world.

In many ways Béranger is similar to the protagonist of another allegory about death, the medieval morality Everyman. But the philosophical bases of the two plays differ enormously. Everyman prepares for death fully convinced that there is an outside force, a God, to whom he can turn for help, and who will reward him for his efforts with an eternal, blissful afterlife. Béranger, on the other hand, is conscious of inhabiting a universe in which man is entirely alone. For him, physical death does not mark the beginning of a new life. All that exists beyond life on earth is, in the words of the Guard, a "Grand Rien." (RM, 45)

Le Roi se meurt is probably the most detailed study of death ever to be presented on the stage. The subject matter of the entire play consists solely of the thoughts and feelings of a man about to die. Unlike most of Ionesco's earlier plays, which create a world that is full, even overcrowded, with people, objects, events, Le Roi se meurt shows us a world pared down to its bare essentials. Everything about the play is stark and spare: the set, which consists only of a room with three thrones, the limited cast of characters, the lack of action. Nothing that is extraneous to the process of death itself is allowed to intrude.

Béranger's kingdom is characterized by decay, decrepitude, disinte-

gration. The central heating in the palace has suddenly ceased to function, cracks appear in the walls, the king's bedroom is covered with cobwebs that appear out of nowhere. Further reports of disasters, both natural and unnatural, flood in from every corner of the kingdom.

Marguerite says,

Son palais est en ruines. Ses terres en friche. Ses montaignes s'affaissent. La mer a défoncé les digues, inondé le pays. (RM, 15)

All wars have been lost, the soldiers have deserted. The young have left the kingdom. In a country that once numbered nine thousand million inhabitants, only one thousand old people remain. No births occur in this land, only deaths. In the nation's schools there remain only "quelques enfants goitreux, débiles mentaux congénitaux, des mongoliens, des hydrocéphales." (RM, 22) While neighbouring countries are enjoying the fertility of spring, here it is November. Cows will not produce milk, vegetation will not grow. Not only the kingdom, but the whole universe seems suddenly to be falling apart:

Médecin: Mars et Saturne sont entrés en collision.

Les deux planètes ont éclaté.

Le soleil a perdu entre cinquante et soixante-quinze pour cent de sa force.

Il tombe de la neige au pôle Nord du soleil. La Voie lactée a l'air de s'agglutiner. La comète est épuisée de fatigue, elle a vieilli, elle s'entoure de sa queue, s'enroule sur elle-même comme un chien moribond. (RM, 17)

There was a time when Béranger had full control over all natural and cosmic forces. He needed only issue his commands, and they would do his bidding. His subjects too had no choice but to obey his every order. Now, as he tries to direct the sun, the clouds, the Guard, Juliette, he finds that nothing happens, or, worse still, they do the opposite of what

he commands. As Marguerite harshly reminds him, he has lost all his powers:

Dans quel état il est ton royaume! Tu ne peux plus le gouverner, tu t'en aperçois toi-même, tu ne veux pas te l'avouer. Tu n'as plus de pouvoir sur toi; plus de pouvoir sur les éléments. Tu ne peux plus empêcher les dégradations, tu n'as plus de pouvoir sur nous. (RM, 23)

When the king tries to assert his strength, to prove his power, he succeeds only in making a fool of himself. He issues orders desperately, at random, only to get no response:

J'ordonne que des arbres poussent du plancher. J'ordonne que le toit disparaisse. Quoi? Rien? J'ordonne qu'il y ait la pluie. J'ordonne qu'il y ait la foudre et que je la tienne dans ma main. J'ordonne que les feuilles repoussent. Quoi! Rien? J'ordonne que Juliette entre par la grande porte. (Juliette entre par la petite porte au fond à droite). Pas par celle-là, par celle-ci. Sors par cette porte. (Il montre la grande porte. Elle sort par la petite porte, à droite, en face.) J'ordonne que tu restes. (Juliette sort). J'ordonne qu'on entende les clairons. J'ordonne que les cloches sonnent. J'ordonne que cent vingt et un coups de canon se fassent entendre en mon honneur. (RM, 29)

This loss of power on the part of Béranger is the first indication of his loosening grip on life. The kingdom and its subjects, the natural forces, are symbols of the things that make up Béranger's, or any man's, personal world. As a man approaches death, his ability to control his world crumbles away. He also begins to lose control over himself. The doctor tells Béranger, " . . . vous n'êtes plus maître de vous-même" (RM, 27), and as the play progresses this becomes more and more apparent. The king enters the stage limping, and announcing that he does not feel well. Although he tries to deny his weakness, his condition deteriorates rapidly. He ages almost instantaneously, as Marie notes to her horror:

Ses cheveux ont blanchi tout d'un coup. Les rides s'accumulent sur son front, sur son visage. Il a vieilli soudain de quatorze siècles. (RM, 31)

He soon loses control over his body: he can no longer stand, sit or move his limbs at will. By the end of the play he has lost the use of his senses. All of this represents the physical deterioration that occurs with death.

Not only the physical, but also the emotional changes experienced by Béranger at the hour of his death are carefully delineated. From the time that he is first informed of his imminent death to the time when death actually takes place, Béranger, like Stanley in The Birthday Party, goes through a number of different emotional states, each of which represents a different sort of attempt to resist, or evade, his fate. When Marguerite first informs him, "Sire, on doit vous annoncer que vous aller mourir" (RM, 20), he refuses to take her statement seriously, answering glibly

Mais je le sais, bien sûr. Nous le savons tous.
 Vous me le rappellerez quand il sera temps. Quelle
 manie avez-vous, Marguerite, de m'entretenir de choses
 désagréables dès le lever du soleil. (RM, 20)

At the next mention of his coming death, Béranger, angrily refusing to believe it, tries to assert his power over his own life. At this point he still has confidence in his ability to control his world:

Qui donc a pu donner des ordres pareils sans mon
 consentement? Je me porte bien. Vous vous moquez.
 Mensonges Je mourrai quand je voudrai, je
 suis le Roi, c'est moi qui décide. (RM, 22-23)

When, with the diminishing of his physical powers, it becomes more and more obvious to Béranger that Marguerite and the Doctor are telling the truth, that he is in fact about to die, he tries to appeal what he considers to be an unjust death sentence. Repeating "Je ne veux pas mourir", he pleads to be spared: "Je vous en prie, ne me laissez pas mourir. Soyez gentils, ne me laissez pas mourir. Je ne veux pas." (RM, 30)

If he must die, he begs at least to be granted a reprieve on the grounds that he has been tricked, that he has not been warned sufficiently, that he has not been given enough time to prepare for death. Marguerite mercilessly destroys his line of defense, reminding him that

A cinquante ans, tu voulais attendre la soixantaine. Tu as eu soixante ans, quatre-vingt-dix ans, cent vingt-cinq ans, deux cents ans, quatre cents ans. Tu n'ajournais plus les préparatifs pour dans dix ans, mais pour dans cinquante ans. Puis, tu as remis cela de siècle en siècle. (RM, 32)

Seeing the exits being closed around him, Béranger is seized with terror. Fear now dominates him completely. Since reasonable attempts at resisting death have failed, he now turns to the unreasonable. He cries out to his subjects to save him, with the irrational hope that one of them will be willing to give up his life for his king's: "Qui veut me donner sa vie? Qui veut donner sa vie au Roi, sa vie au bon Roi, sa vie au pauvre Roi?" (RM, 16)

As his feelings of fear and desperation mount, Béranger grows ever more unreasonable and selfish. He is like a drowning man who would not hesitate to pull another man under if there was any chance that this may enable him to save himself. He would be happy to see all mankind, all life on earth destroyed if he could be spared:

Petit soleil, bon soleil, défends-moi. Dessèche et tue le monde entier s'il faut un petit sacrifice. Que tous meurent pourvu que je vive éternellement même tout seul dans le désert sans frontières. Je m'arrangerai avec la solitude. Je garderai le souvenir des autres, je les regretterai sincèrement. Je peux vivre dans l'immensité transparente du vide. Il vaut mieux regretter que d'être regretté. (RM, 42)

Having indicated that he will readily sacrifice any other life in order to save his own, Béranger ironically accuses others of selfishness, as he speculates that he is not assured immortality even in the memory of his people:

Ils oublieront avant. Des égoïstes, tous, tous.
 Ils ne pensent qu'à leur vie, qu'à leur peau.
 Pas à la mienne. (RM, 41)

As his own life ebbs away, Béranger suddenly develops a great interest in the lives of others. He asks Juliette, whom he has hardly noticed before, to describe her daily routine. To her amazement, he reacts ecstatically to her every mention of a menial chore, a commonplace activity. He marvels at the light she sees each morning, the cheap dress she puts on, her journey to and from the market, the colours of the fruit she sees in the stalls. To a dying man every minute detail of life seems incredibly beautiful, for he is fully aware of the fragility and transience of all things.

Having attempted every possible means of resisting death, having worn himself out with violent emotional reactions of anger and fear, Béranger has now reached the end of the road. The emotional note on which the play ends is one of helplessness. It is not however resignation. At no point in the play does Béranger actually consent to die; he simply cannot alter the fact of his mortality. Thus Béranger, rather than death - in the person of Marguerite - emerges as the moral victor.

Le Roi se meurt is essentially a ceremony, directed by Marguerite, the agent of death, and designed to force Béranger to submit to his condition of mortality. He must, in her words, learn to die with dignity. In order to do so, he must detach himself from the things of this world, from life, represented by Marie, and turn to death. From the beginning of the ceremony Marguerite encourages him to abdicate - both his kingdom and his life:

Béranger: Je comprends. C'est un complot. Vous voulez que j'abdique.
 Marguerite: Cela vaudrait mieux. Abdique volontairement.

Médecin: Abdiquez, Sire, cela vaut mieux.

Béranger: Que j'abdique?

Marguerite: Oui. Abdique moralement, administrativement.

Médecin: Et Physiquement. (RM, 23)

and she continues to insist that he turn his back to the world:

Ce qu'il doit apprendre, c'est de céder un peu, puis de s'abandonner carrément. (RM, 44)

Il faudra qu'il ne regarde plus autour, qu'il ne s'accroche plus aux images, il faut qu'il rentre en lui et qu'il s'enferme. (RM, 46)

But Béranger does not submit as readily as he would have wished.

He loves Marie, and he hates Marguerite. Although all men know that they must die one day, this knowledge tends to become obscured:

"Marguerite: Les hommes savent. Ils font comme s'ils ne savaient pas!

Ils savent et ils oublient." (RM, 12), as they become habituated to

living: "Marguerite: Tu t'es enlisé dans la boue tiède des vivants."

(RM, 31) The habit of life is not an easy one to break, as Ionesco remarks:

Plus je vis, plus je me sens lié à la vie, évidemment. Je m'y enfonce de plus en plus, je suis accroché, englué, pris. . . . Je m'y suis habitué; habitué à vivre. De moins en moins préparé à mourir. Qu'il me sera pénible de me défaire de tous ces liens accumulés pendant toute une vie." (Notes, 220)

Since the only reality any man has ever known is that of his own life, he cannot conceive of it suddenly ending. Death is "unnatural": "If to die were a good thing we should all hasten to kill ourselves, all of us and at once. Why wait?"⁸ Every man believes that he was made to live forever: Béranger cries, "Les rois devraient être immortels."

(RM, 31) Le Roi se meurt contains some of the most poignant and anguished expressions of man's anger, bewilderment, and humiliation at his mortal condition. Béranger cries out against the unnaturalness of a life that does not go on forever:

Pourquoi suis-je né si ce n'était pas pour toujours?
Maudits parents. Quelle drôle d'idée, quelle bonne
blague! (RM, 37)

Since he himself is unable to learn to hate life and love death, he wonders how others have done it before him:

Vous, les suicidés, apprenez-moi comment il faut faire
pour acquérir le dégoût de l'existence. Apprenez-moi
la lassitude. Quelle drogue faut-il prendre pour cela?
(RM, 44)

Marguerite gains power over Béranger, as inevitably she must. She causes Marie and the others to disappear. Left alone with the king, she proceeds to cut the cords that still bind him to life, to strip him of his worldly possessions. Even at this late point Béranger tries feebly to resist, but resistance is no longer possible. The final scene of the play, in which everything slowly disappears, leaving only the rigid king on his throne, bathed in a greyish light, and finally, only a bare stage, demonstrates very clearly the absolute finality of death.

In his writings on the theatre, Ionesco complains that of all the arts in the twentieth century, the theatre has been the least progressive. New developments in the theatre are prevented from taking place by the continuing belief that theatre must be realistic and psychological, that it must create a perfect illusion:

. . . pour le théâtre, il semble qu'il se soit arrêté à
1930. C'est le théâtre qui est le plus en retard. L'avant-
garde a été stoppée au théâtre, sinon dans la littérature.
. . . En effet, cette avant-garde, abandonnée, n'a pas
été dépassée mais enterrée par le retour réactionnaire des
vieilles formules théâtrales qui, parfois, osaient se
prétendre nouvelles. Le théâtre n'est pas de notre temps:
il exprime une psychologie périmée, une construction
boulevardière, une prudence bourgeoise, un réalisme qui
peut ne pas s'intituler conventionnel mais qui l'est, une
soumission à des dogmatismes menaçants pour l'artiste.
(Notes, 36)

It has often been pointed out that even those modern dramatists who wished to express new and unconventional ideas couched them in conservative, outmoded forms. It was only with the arrival of such dramatists as Ionesco and Beckett that a real revolution took place in the theatre: "Sartre et Camus expliquaient l'absurde. Ionesco le montre . . . "9

Sounding at times very much like Artaud in Le Théâtre et son double, Ionesco denounces present-day theatre for not being metaphysical: "Le théâtre actuel est presque uniquement psychologique, social, cérébral ou . . . poétique. Il est amétaphysique." (Notes, 169) Like Artaud, Ionesco calls for a violent revolution within the theatre. If modern theatre is to surpass its narrow boundaries, if it is to achieve some significance, an ability to speak meaningfully to all men, there must be found a new kind of dramatist:

. . . un grand naïf J'entends une naïveté lucide, jaillissant des sources profondes de l'être, les révélant, nous les révélant à nous-mêmes, nous restituant notre naïveté, notre être secret. (Notes, 10)

a completely new spirit concept of the theatre:

Pour s'arracher au quotidien, à l'habitude, à la paresse mentale qui nous cache l'étrangeté du monde, il faut recevoir comme un véritable coup de matraque. Sans une virginité nouvelle de l'esprit, sans une nouvelle prise de conscience, purifiée, de la réalité existentielle, il n'y a pas de théâtre, il n'y a pas d'art non plus; il faut réaliser une sorte de dislocation du réel, qui doit précéder sa réintégration. (Notes, 13)

and a whole new kind of drama:

Un autre genre de théâtre est encore possible. D'une force, d'une richesse plus grandes. Un théâtre non pas symboliste, mais symbolique; non pas allégorique, mais mythique; ayant sa source dans nos angoisses éternelles: un théâtre où l'invisible devient visible, où l'idée se fait image concrète, réalité, où le problème prend chair; où l'angoisse est là, évidence vivante,

énorme; théâtre qui aveuglerait les sociologues, mais qui donnerait à penser, à vivre au savant dans ce qui n'est pas savant en lui: à l'homme commun, par-delà son ignorance. (Notes, 206)

This new kind of theatre will make no attempt to create convincing illusions of "real" life. Ionesco does not believe that an artist should be obliged to produce pale imitations of nature. Art has an independent reality, one that is different from, but as valid as, ordinary, "outside", reality:

A play is fiction, an imaginary world. Art is not - we must continue repeating this truism which we forget - an imitation of nature, of the world. It has a new nature, it is a different world.¹⁰

In his attempts to revolutionize the modern theatre Ionesco calls for "le grossissement des effets". (Notes, 12-13) Since theatre is false anyway - what we see on the stage is not "real life", but only a play - its falseness should be not covered up but accentuated as much as possible. Everything should be carried to its extreme. Violence, caricature, parody, exaggeration of every sort are encouraged. Emotions should be pushed to their limits; humour should take the form not of toned-down wit, or irony, but burlesque. Attempts at creating plots with logical developments, and psychologically motivated characters should be abandoned:

Pas d'intrigue, alors, pas d'architecture, pas d'énigmes à résoudre mais de l'inconnue insoluble, pas de caractères, des personnages sans identité . . . simplement une suite sans suite, un enchaînement fortuit, sans relation de cause à effet, d'aventures inexplicables ou d'états émotifs, ou un enchevêtrement indescriptible mais vivant, d'intentions, de mouvements, de passions sans unité, plongeant dans la contradiction (Notes, 136-37)

Ionesco's own plays are full of unexpected, seemingly impossible happenings - transformations, inversions, apparitions, illogical sequences of events - that we all experience in dreams, but are not accustomed to

seeing on the stage. His characters too are often unrealistic - indistinguishable cardboard cut-outs, marionettes, allegorical figures.

Like Artaud, Ionesco wishes the distinction between theatre and literature to be made more apparent:

Pousser le théâtre au-delà de cette zone intermédiaire qui n'est ni théâtre, ni littérature, c'est le restituer à son cadre propre, à ses limites naturelles. (Notes, 13)

In the light of all that Ionesco has said about his intentions as a playwright, and in the light of the type of plays that he has written, a critic who can find fault with him because

M. Ionesco is not a writer, but a playwright; his medium is not language, but theatre, a complex of word - one might say, simply, sound - and silence, movement and posture, expression and the absence of expression. His plays live only on the stage or, if on the printed page, then only to those who approach them with a theatrical imagination; to read them after seeing them performed is to see how really insubstantial they are.¹¹

is only demonstrating his own lack of understanding of Ionesco.

In Le Roi se meurt Ionesco follows his own theatrical precepts.

The play has no dramatic plot: it can simply be described as the progression of a man from life to death. As has already been noted, the characters, particularly Béranger, Marguerite, Marie, are allegorical figures. They are not meant to be taken realistically, but rather symbolically. We would not think, for example, of questioning the statements made about Béranger's lifespan on the grounds that no real man in the real world lives for hundreds of years.

Like Beckett and Pinter, Ionesco tries to use the medium of the stage to its full potential by employing various extra-literary devices: theatrical tricks, movement, ritual, gesture. The outer trappings of the play serve as reflections of the inner state of Béranger's mind at the time of his death. The set, consisting only of an almost bare

stage, corresponds to his now-empty world. The grey light at the end casts the gloom of death on the stage. The disappearance of Marie, Juliette, the Guard, the Doctor, accentuates the fact that every man must face death in solitude. Finally, the disappearance of the set, and then, Béranger himself, represents the annihilation of a whole world, which takes place with the death of any one man.

Le Roi se meurt is a ritual - a death rite. Within the extended outer ritual which is the whole play, there is a series of shorter rituals, each of which is directed towards a specific purpose. First, there is the ceremonial invocation to time, in which Béranger and Marie, having assumed the proper position for the ceremony, beg time to turn back. Then there is the litany to the dead. This is like a full-scale religious ceremony, with slowly chanted prayers to the souls of the dead, accompanied by stylized movements. Finally there is the ritualized dethroning and disrobing of the king which symbolizes his break with all things of this world. Here again Marguerite's words are accompanied by stylized gestures. She mimes the removal of various invisible burdens from Béranger's body.

Like Beckett in Fin de partie, Ionesco regularly reminds his audience that it is watching a play, breaking any illusion of "reality" that may have been created. The characters mention that they are taking part in a prearranged ceremony, which is the play itself. No suspense is built up around the expectation of the king's death. Nobody wonders, will the king actually die? when will he die?, for Marguerite says quite explicitly: "Tu vas mourir dans une heure et demie, tu vas mourir à la fin du spectacle." (RM, 22) The periodic interruption of the play's dialogue by the guard - to comment on the action, to announce the state

of the king's health, serves as in Brecht's theatre, to distance the audience from the events taking place on the stage.

Like the plays of Beckett and Pinter, Le Roi se meurt cannot be fitted neatly into any of the traditional theatrical genres. It is neither pure farce, nor pure comedy, nor pure tragedy. It too must be considered to that mixed category of modern plays that have been variously termed "tragic farce",¹² "metaphysical farce",¹³ "grotesque".¹⁴

Ionesco gained his fame as an author of outrageous farces. All of his plays are comic, at least on the surface. Laughter, according to Coe, is Ionesco's method of dealing with a meaningless world:

Réaliser soudainement, que le cosmos est simplement dénué de sens, est plus que déprimant, c'est insupportable et lorsqu'une situation est insupportable, lorsqu'il n'y a littéralement pas de solution, ni dans l'action, ni dans la prière, ni même dans la mort, alors les seules réactions possibles sont irrationnelles: les larmes ou le rire. Et Ionesco préfère le rire.¹⁵

Ionesco himself never tires of speaking about the importance of humour. Humour is a liberating force, it provides the distance that is necessary for lucidity, it brings some semblance of sanity into an irrational world:

L'humour, c'est la liberté. . . . L'humour fait prendre conscience avec une lucidité libre de la condition tragique ou dérisoire de l'homme (Notes, 121)

Une seule démystification reste vraie: celle qui est produite par l'humour surtout s'il est noir; la logique se révèle dans l'illogisme de l'absurde dont on a pris conscience; le rire est seul à ne respecter aucun tabou, à ne pas permettre l'édification des nouveaux tabous anti-tabous; le comique est seul en mesure de nous donner la force de supporter la tragédie de l'existence. (Notes, 122-23)

Ionesco's predilection for humour must not, however be mistaken for optimism. His vision of the world is unmistakably tragic. But there is no conflict between these two tendencies. Contrary to what we may think,

the comic is not very far removed from the tragic: "Je n'ai jamais compris, pour ma part, la différence que l'on fait entre comique et tragique." (Notes, 13) In fact, Ionesco sees comedy to be even more cruel than tragedy. Man can find some comfort in tragedy. It raises the stature of man, and it frees him from some of his responsibility for his actions, since it makes him a victim of forces beyond his control:

Pour certains, le tragique peut paraître, en un sens, réconfortant, car, s'il veut exprimer l'impuissance de l'homme vaincu, brisé par la fatalité par exemple, le tragique reconnaît, par la même, la réalité d'une fatalité, d'un destin, de lois régissant l'Univers, incompréhensibles parfois, mais objectives. (Notes, 14)

Comedy, on the other hand, and particularly farce, is heartless and brutal; it offers man no relief:

Le comique étant intuition de l'absurde, il me semble plus désespérant que le tragique. Le comique n'offre pas d'issue. (Notes, 13-14)

For a man with Ionesco's cast of mind, a blend of tragedy and farce is a most suitable combination.

Like The Birthday Party and Fin de partie, Le Roi se meurt may be described as a play dealing with a matter that is essentially tragic, in a manner that is fundamentally comic. The pattern of Ionesco's play is similar to that of Pinter's, since both develop as a progression from comedy or farce, to tragedy as the predominant mood. Le Roi se meurt begins as a farce. Even the music that is played at the start of the play is "dérisoirement royale". The introductions of the characters, for example, "Sa Sommité, monsieur le Médecin du Roi, chirurgien, bacteriologue, bourreau et astrologue à la Cour" (RM, 10), the absent-minded movements of the doctor, the petty squabbles over the household chores, inevitably provoke laughter in the audience. The reports of

further disasters in the kingdom and the cosmos, although they deal with deaths and destruction, are humourous because they are so numerous and exaggerated. The entrance of the king, and his awkward unsuccessful attempts to demonstrate his powers, are still situated in the realm of farce. It is only as Béranger, and with him, the audience, grows more fully aware of the seriousness of his predicament, that the laughter begins to subside. Although Juliette, the Guard and the Doctor, who function chiefly as comic figures, still provide some humour, the mood of the play becomes progressively more tragic as the king's fear and desperation grow. The shift in mood is gradual and imperceptible - there is no point in the play which could be pointed out as the end of farce and the beginning of tragedy - and until the very end of the play it is not complete. Just before the final, truly tragic scene, there is still the comic effect of the incongruity between the servants' declarations of loyalty to their king, and their immediate disappearance. But just as the play opened on a note of pure farce, it now closes on a note of pure tragedy. The closing scene of Le Roi se meurt is a serious and moving expression of the tragedy of man's mortal condition.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Rosette C. Lamont, "The Hero in Spite of Himself," Yale French Studies, No. 29 (1962), pp. 73-81.
- 2 Pinter, cited by Esslin, The Peopled Wound, p. 26.
- 3 Coe, "La Farce tragique," p. 25.
- 4 Richard N. Coe, Ionesco (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1961), p. 25.
- 5 Ibid., p. 65.
- 6 Ibid., p. 75.
- 7 Ibid., p. 74.
- 8 Eugene Ionesco, "Selections from the Journals," trans. Rosette C. Lamont, Yale French Studies, No. 29 (1962), p. 9.
- 9 A. Simon, "Ionesco et la mort des autres," Esprit, 31 (1963), 1148.
- 10 Ionesco, "Selections from the Journals," p. 9.
- 11 Barbour, "Beckett and Ionesco," p. 276.
- 12 Coe, "La Farce tragique."
- 13 Rosette C. Lamont, "The Metaphysical Farce," French Review, 32 (1959), 319-28.
- 14 Kott, Shakespeare Our Contemporary.
- 15 Coe, "La Farce tragique," p. 29.

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